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QUANTUM FICTION:

RELATIVITY AND POSTMODERNISM

IN LAWRENCE DURRELL'S THE ALEXANDRIA QUARTET

by

SUSAN H. YOUNG

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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Abstract

QUANTUM FICTION:

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IN LAWRENCE DURRELL'S THE ALEXANDRIA QUARTET

by

Susan H. Young

Adviser: Prof. Michael Timko

One of the most important developments in modern, and postmodern, literature has been the incorporation of the concepts, language and images of science. In writing The Alexandria Quartet Lawrence Durrell made an attempt to mediate between Einsteinian relativistic physics and literature. Durrell's uniqueness was in his openly declared strategy to use relativity as the controlling structural principle of the Quartet, and his belief that relativity and quantum theory could somehow be appropriated for literary purposes. In the preface to Balthazar, one of the Quartet's four novels, he says: "I have turned to science and am trying to complete a four decker novel whose form is based on the relativity proposition. Three sides of space and one of time constitute the soup mix of a continuum." This dissertation analyses Durrell's use of relativity as a unifying principle of the Quartet, and evaluates his success in transposing the components of relativity onto the

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the matrix of the novel form, not only as a structuring device, but in terms of language, metaphor, time, point of view, and accurate interpretation of the laws of relativistic physics. The discussion concludes with an examination of the ways in which Durrell's use of Einsteinian relativity in the Quartet establishes him as what I call a "bridge writer" between modernism and postmodernism, with the Quartet ultimately revealing itself to be more postmodernist than modernist in nature.

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CHAPTER I Introduction: Einsteinian Relativity, in Durrell's Quartet; Building a Bridge To Postmodernism

One of the most significant developments in modern literature has been the evolution of literary forms incorporating the concepts, images and language of science. Since the Middle Ages there have been ongoing and well documented debates between academic proponents of an empirical scientific world view and those who favor either a conservative religious ethic, like that prevalent during the time of St. Augustine, or, more recently, a humanistically oriented philosophy. It was not until the eighteenth century that scientific ideology found its way into literary art, and then almost always in the form of the prose essay. The gap between what C.P. Snow termed "the two cultures" narrowed substantially in the latter half of the nineteenth century when scientific concepts and metaphors were used with increasing frequency by writers and poets such as Tennyson (In Memoriam) and Browning (The Ring And The Book). Matthew Arnold wrote "Science and Literature," and Thomas Carlyle, Samuel Butler and Thomas Huxley each wrote critical essays dealing directly or obliquely with the encroachment of science on modern society. This sudden literary attention to science and its various aspects was not surprising in light of the fact that this period saw the emergence of the three giants of modern science: Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein. The result was an unprecedented explosion of scientific progress, which in turn generated enormous academic and cultural enthusiasm for science, along with considerable controversy over the philosophical impact of scientific ideology in other fields, particularly the arts.

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Subsequent developments in twentieth century English literature have revealed a trend towards incorporation of scientific concepts and imagery derived from reactions both for and against scientific culture. This genre attempts to incorporate the language, constructs and philosophical aspects of all scientific fields into conventional literary forms. However, despite the need for literature reflecting the tremendous social and cultural impact of science over the past century and a half, there have been difficulties in successfully integrating the elements of science with those of literature.

One concern is the question of whether or not the process of acquiring scientific literacy (and, by extension, scientific literacy through literature) differs significantly from that of acquiring non-scientific literacy. The answer seems to be that it does. First, not only is the subject matter of science different from other systems of thought, but its approach to, and perspective on, ideas tends to emphasize deductive over inductive reasoning. Second, abstract scientific constructs often defy conceptualization, much less commission to paper. As will become apparent in the following discussion, relativity provides a notable example of this phenomenon. The third area of difficulty concerns language. The lack of an extensive vocabulary common to both pure science and literature is a dilemma against which C.P. Snow protested in his discussion of "the two cultures" (81).

Herbert Muller advocates the resolution of art-science polarity, especially in the field of theoretical physics: "The all-important implication of the physicists' new view is that it makes possible a reconciliation of philosophy, art and science after long years of invidious specialization in different orders of 'knowledge' and exasperated dispute over

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different levels of 'truth'" (92). In the published version of his theory of relativity Einstein, the icon for twentieth century science and intellect, discusses the necessity for understanding the implications of natural law in general, and relativistic physics in particular:

> The concepts of space, time, and event can be put into relation with experiences. Considered logically, they are free creations of the human intelligence, tools of thought which are to serve the purpose of bringing experiences into relation with each other, so that in this way they may be better surveyed. The effort to become conscious of these fundamental concepts should show to what extent we are bound to these concepts in terms of their empirical sources. In this way we become aware of our freedom, of which, in cases of necessity, it is always a difficult matter to make sensible use.
>
> Why is it necessary to drag down from the Olympian fields of Plato the fundamental ideas of thought in natural science, and to attempt to reveal their lineage? Answer: in order to be free of the taboo attached to them, and thus achieve greater freedom in the formation of thoughts and ideas (141).

In spite of these problems, it is the infiltration of scientific ideas and creations into all areas of human endeavor that has given it enormous power over the collective imagination of twentieth century society. As far as literature is concerned, Carol C. Donley and Alan Friedman point out that "twentieth century literature grew up in the same environment with relativity, quantum theory, process philosophy, and modern art. They all created and shared a family of ideas carried by new forms" (2). Moreover, "major contemporary writers have implicitly and explicitly been affected by ideas in fundamental science, in particular Einstein's theory of relativity and quantum theory, even when those ideas have been filtered and distorted through ubiquitous popularizations" (3).

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In the twentieth century the ideas of Einstein have influenced British literature, both directly and indirectly, by creating, describing, and extrapolating the tenets of relativity and quantum theory, both of which have irrevocably altered the way we view ourselves and the universe. Philipp Frank comments that "it can be said that anyone who comprehends even a little of Einstein's work and its influence, and his personality, will have taken a long step toward understanding the world in the twentieth century" (xiii).

In writing The Alexandria Quartet Lawrence Durrell made an attempt to mediate between literature and relativistic physics; this effort originated out of the desire to construct what Gerald Holton terms "modified themata and metaphors of general power" (xxvii) using the concept of relativity. Durrell's uniqueness lies in the fact that he openly declared his strategy of using relativity as the controlling principle in the construction of the Quartet, thereby allying himself with the belief that the concept could somehow be appropriated for literary purposes. In the preface to Balthazar, one of the novels comprising the Quartet, he says:

> Modern literature offers us no Unities, so I have turned to science and am trying to complete a four decker novel whose form is based on the relativity proposition. Three sides of space and one of time constitute the soup mix recipe of a continuum (9).

He elaborates this idea in A Key To Modern British Poetry:

> I am not suggesting that modern poetry is constructed to illustrate quantum theory, but I do suggest that it unconsciously reproduces something like the space-time continuum in the way that it uses words and phrases; and its forms are cyclic rather than extended. Time, both in the poem and in the novel, has taken on a different aspect (77).

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While this observation is indisputably true, Durrell's success in attempting to manipulate the relativistic premise and translate it into what may be called a "quantum novel" is contingent upon the extent to which he assimilated relativity in the novel form.

My intention is to analyze critically (and to evaluate the accuracy and extent of) Durrell's use of relativity as a unifying principle in The Alexandria Quartet. By so doing I will judge Durrell's success in achieving his aim of transposing the components of relativity onto the matrix of the novel form. Since this literal transposition occurs not only on a structural level, but also in terms of language, metaphor, the use of time in relation to point of view, and the additional integration of quantum physics into the texture of the tetralogy, these elements will be individually evaluated as to their importance in creating Durrell's "word continuum." I will discuss each of the four novels – Justine, Balthazar, Mountolive and Clea – both as isolated works and as functional elements of the Quartet to determine exactly how and to what degree they constitute a four-dimensional literary construction consisting of, as Durrell stated, three spatially deployed novels (Justine, Balthazar and Mountolive) and one that is temporally deployed (Clea). Redefining space and time in the novel is not a new concept; Proust, Joyce and Woolf did this long before The Alexandria Quartet. However, to attempt such a redefinition using relativity and quantum physics as philosophical and structural starting points marks a departure from previous literary experiments in time and space.

Furthermore, evidence of Durrell's success in assimilating Einstein's theories in the fabric of the Quartet's complex literary fabric is in part dependent upon his understanding of these concepts and their implications. Theoretical relativity is a concept that exists for

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the most part in the context of abstraction. Was Durrell, in writing The Alexandria Quartet, attempting to marry theoretical physics and literary art in an absolute sense, or was he aware of the limitations of this process and intending, through literary experimentation, to produce instead an alloy derived from both fields? Before the consideration of how relativity evolves throughout the Quartet can be undertaken, one needs to clarify the nature and extent of understanding on Durrell's part. I will attempt to accomplish this through an examination of Durrell's correspondence with Henry Miller during the quartet's progress; in addition: there are numerous articles and interviews in which Durrell discusses his ideas concerning the use of relativity and quantum theory in literature.

Although three previous considerations of Durrell's experimentation with Einstein's ideas have been produced in doctoral dissertations, in each case the author chose to focus on specific and isolated elements related to Einstein's theory. For example, James Raymond Morrison emphasizes the importance of time in Durrell's Quartet, as well as other of his novels such as Nunquam, The Black Book, and Bitter Lemons. Morrison's treatment excludes extensive reference to other aspects like spatial deployment and relativity-derived language and metaphors (35:1116-17A). Nancy Whyte Lewis focuses solely on Durrell's spatial structures and metaphors with a thorough evaluation of the Quartet's multiple-dimension structure (37:7143-44A) Sharon Lee Brown provides an excellent overview of Durrell's use of relativity in terms of its structural applications, exploring as well the role of The Black Book as a precursor to the writing of the Quartet, and suggests Durrell's literary indebtedness to the work of Proust and Bergson. However,

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Brown gives very little space to analyzing the effectiveness of Durrell's experimentation with relativity or to the possibility that an innovative step towards the creation of a unique literary form had been taken. She concludes that "there is little wisdom to be gained from The Alexandria Quartet" (26:7310).

With regard to the actual content of the Quartet, that is, Durrell's exploration of modern love, the use of multiple viewpoints, and the historical context of the novels, Brown's contention is generally valid. However, relativity used as the foundation for a major literary construction is innovative and deserving of close examination, not merely because the Quartet exists as an example of science-based literature, but also because it points to a larger trend and broader context for literary creation, experimental or otherwise. Moreover, to appreciate fully Durrell's achievement in writing the Quartet one must consider all elements involved in the relativity proposition: time, space, causality, the definition of dimensionality in both physics and literature, and the role of perspective in the relationship of observer and observed. If in fact Durrell deviated from the details of Einstein's theory, then there is much to be gained from an analysis of Durrell's experimentation. How effectively can scientific ideology be grafted onto a literary matrix, and what are the limitations determining such a transposition?

At first glance the principle of relativity appears deceptively simple: the speed of light is constant for all objects, from all points of reference and regardless of their state of rest or motion. This postulate raises an interesting paradox, one which provides seemingly contradictory answers to the question: does light behave like a bullet, or like the sound of the bullet being fired? Einstein's answer was that to an observer moving in the direction of

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the bullet, light behaves like the bullet, while to an observer standing stationary on the ground it behaves like the bullet's sound.

The theory arose out of Einstein's work with light propagation, but his genius was to realize that the theory had general applications beyond the phenomenon of light behavior. Although the arguments of relativity are simple and straightforward, the consequences seem to fly in the face of common sense. For instance, one remains free to regard any linearly moving body at constant speed as standing still. Every peculiarity arising from relativity derives from a single problem: when something happens far away, it takes time traveling at light speed to reach an observer with the information. As a result, two observers applying Einstein's postulate in their manner, and assuming they are moving linearly and uniformly in relative motion, will disagree about the time lapse between the happening and the arrival of the news of the event. Therefore, they cannot agree about the original time of the event. They may agree on what they saw, but not about when they saw it. This leads to bewildering contradictions in perspective on the parts of the two observers about the same event.

Einstein reformulated classical physics to include the properties of light, and later, in an attempt to broaden the definition, attempted to incorporate gravity and the inclusion of light properties of accelerated moving bodies. This formed the basis of the General Theory of Relativity of 1916, and in this context the idea of "force" became unnecessary; instead, the action of "fields" shaped the fabric of space, and a straight line was no longer the shortest distance between two points.

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In a broad context, Einstein's conceptual accomplishment was that he took man and placed him in a universe where his preconceptions of time and space were shattered and then reconstructed in a revolutionary and, for many, untenable perspective. The effects of Einstein's redefinition can be substantiated largely as a result of his influence within various intellectual segments of society in general, and the fact that he introduced scientific concepts which have revolutionized human perception, particularly in regard to issues of time and space. As defined by Einstein, relativity is far more than a brilliant resolution of an age-old problem in theoretical physics; it can be viewed as a philosophy of life.

Literary artists and theorists proceeded not only to question the language with which they recorded perceptions of reality, but also to incorporate the ideology of relativistic physics in a literary context. The theory had to be shaped, modified or reinterpreted by writers, poets, or critics in order to render it accessible to readers. Among literary artists there were mixed reactions to relativity. On the one hand, there was a feeling of despair, the result of being suddenly alienated from a universe whose configuration now seemed hopelessly remote from the vocabulary of high literature. Lionel Trilling expresses this sentiment in the following manner:

> The operative conceptions [of science] are alien to the mass of educated persons. They generate no cosmic speculation, they do not engage emotion or challenge imagination. Our poets are indifferent to them...
>
> * * *
>
> This exclusion of most of us from the mode of thought which habitually is said to be a wound given to our intellectual self-esteem. About this wound we all agree to be silent, but can we doubt that it has its consequences, that it introduced into the life of the mind a significant element of dubiety and alienation

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> which must be taken into account in any estimation that is made of the present fortunes of mind (13-14).

Nevertheless, relativity became an important influence in the literary world, and a source of theme, structure and metaphor for Robert Frost, Archibald MacLeish, E.E. Cummings, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. William Carlos Williams wrote "St. Francis Einstein of the Daffodils," creating in the process what he called a "relatively stable foot," as opposed to a rigid one, declaring in addition that "relativity applies to everything" (283). While there was considerably less enthusiasm among many of Williams's literary colleagues, there were at least as many who concurred with Sartre's observation that "the theory of relativity applies in full to the universe of fiction " (23). Theoretically, this appears to be true, made possible by an ideology that allowed certain poets and writers to marry scientific ideas to literary constructs, producing new forms of literature embodying a unique vocabulary of metaphors. Gerald Holton cautions against looking for direct transformations from physics to literature:

> The good poet is a poet surely because he can transcend rather than triangulate. In Faulkner, in Eliot's The Waste Land, in Woolf's The Waves, in Mann's Magic Mountain, it is futile to judge whether the traces of modern physics are good physics or bad physics, for these trace elements have been used in the making of a new alloy (xx).

> Moreover, both scientist and literary artist share a common cultural purpose, which Einstein himself stated as being to give an idea of the eternal struggle of the inventive human mind for a fuller understanding of the laws governing physical phenomena. (Einstein and Infeld, 81) Furthermore, he saw similarities between the etiology of literary and scientific ideas, including the idea that in both cases the constructions are of a "purely fictional character," and are often "deduced from experience by abstraction." ("Physics and Reality" 221).

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After the publication of his theory, Einstein quickly rose to icon status as the implications of his work became both clarified and popularized. Arthur Eddington, in The Contemporary Review of December, 1919, wrote: "The theoretical researches of Professor Einstein of Berlin, now so strikingly confirmed by the British eclipse expedition, involve a broadening of our views of external nature, comparable with, or perhaps exceeding the advances associated with Copernicus, Newton and Darwin." On the occasion of Einstein's visit to London the Manchester Guardian of June 10, 1921 offered a somewhat more poetic explanation of the great physicist's sociological impact:

> The man in the street, a traveler between life and death, is compact of all elements, and is devoid neither of science nor of poetry. He may have few ideas in either, but he probably cherishes what he has and whatever touches them nearly is of moment to him. Professor Einstein's theory of relativity, however vaguely he may comprehend it, disturbs fundamentally his basic conceptions of the universe and even of his own mind. It challenges somehow the absolute nature of his thought. The very idea that he can use his mind in a disinterested way is assailed by a conception which gives particularity to every perception.

Donley and Friedman give two further reasons for Einstein's influence:

> First, his work had strong resonances with the contemporary revolutions occurring in art, music, theatre and literature. Through popularizations of his theories Einstein served as a muse for these other revolutions. While his works were certainly not the only spurs to cultural innovation, Einstein proved to be a remarkably rich and authoritative source of idea and metaphor. Secondly, Einstein's personal image came to represent the power of scientific intellect. Einstein's face was a convenient literal image for discussions of genius, rational thought and abstract notions (80).

In terms of cultural impact, there is no doubt that Einstein's work was enormously influential within the field of physics, but it remains somewhat less clear precisely how, and to what degree, relativity affected other spheres of study, and society in general.

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Nevertheless, as Donley and Friedman maintain, it is indisputable that relativity disturbed prevailing ideas regarding the role of pure science in relation to society. In addition, there was a ripple effect as the philosophic implications of the theory were assimilated in other fields. Echoes of relativity are found in the experimental work of many early twentieth century artists, sculptors, architects, playwrights and musicians. Philosophy and literature, however, appear to be the two disciplines most successful in their assimilation and modification of Einstein's theory for the express purpose of adding dimension to their respective ideological frameworks.

The impact of relativity in philosophical circles was profound. Gerald Holton cites the intense reactions of prominent philosophers at the time, from Henri Bergson and Alfred North Whitehead to John Passmore, who noted that "physics fell heir to the responsibility of metaphysics" (332). Bertrand Russell and Karl Popper were deeply affected by the 1905 publication of Einstein's theory and Claude Levi-Strauss's concept of cultural relativism evolved partially out of his invocation of physical relativity.

This leads to the issue of distinguishing between the ideology of physical relativity and the philosophy of relativism, a distinction which Einstein himself was careful to make, and one which has been consistently ignored by many who would like to establish a direct link between the realm of relativistic physics and applications of physics in other fields. This is one reason for the difficulty in analyzing the use of relativity, as opposed to relativism, in literature such as The Alexandria Quartet. The two philosophies are similar in some respects, but there is an important additional factor in relativity and it is difficult to discern precisely where it has been modified by the machinery of literary expression.

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Often the perception of relativity is that it implies that all viewpoints, time referents, narrators, themes or plots are equal parts of a whole which, when all the elements are combined, constitute a truth we call "reality." Holton explains that, on the contrary, Einstein's relativity tells us that

> under certain conditions we can extract from different reports, or even from the report originating in one frame properly identified, all the laws of physics, each applicable in any framework, each having therefore an invariant meaning, one that does not depend on the accident of which frame one inhabits. It is for this reason that, by comparison with classical physics, modern relativity is simple, universal, and, one may even say, "absolute." The cliche became, erroneously, that "everything is relative," whereas the whole point is that out of the vast flux one can distill the very opposite: "some things are invariant" (xv)

.

This distinction is an important factor for evaluating Durrell's Quartet, since he constructed the four novels around relativity and quantum mechanics, not philosophical relativism.

Einstein was often annoyed by attempts to simplify and/or transpose relativity theory onto other fields of study. A key factor in these attempts by writers, philosophers, and other artists, was a misunderstanding of what exactly the relativity proposition meant. The popularized notion was that relativity stipulated the absolute equality of all perceptions, points of view, and frames of reference in the creation of "the truth". However, Einstein was quick to point out that, on the contrary,

> For the description of a given state of facts one uses almost always only one system of coordinates. The theory says only that the general laws are such that their form does not depend on the choice of the system of coordinates.
>
> ***
>
> A multiplicity of systems of coordinates is not needed for its representation. It is completely sufficient to describe the whole mathematically in relation to one system of coordinates (xv).

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The common interpretation of relativity as "everything is relative," therefore, is incorrect. The essence of relativity is in fact that "some things are invariant," an idea that Einstein himself affirmed in his informal correspondence, where he referred to relativity as "Invariantentheorie" (xv).

Durrell read extensively about relativity prior to writing the Quartet, but Gerald Holton points out that most of Durrell's knowledge came from popularized accounts such as James Jeans' The Mysterious Universe. Holton concludes that Durrell's incorporation of relativity into the Quartet exemplifies the famous comment by Wolfgang Pauli about an ill-conceived physical theory: "It is not even wrong" (xvii). However, I contend that this assessment of Durrell's Quartet is not entirely accurate. He does use invariance, most notably by anchoring the narratives, characters, and their multiple perspectives, in the "framework" of a timeless (and therefore temporally transcendent) Alexandria.

In the first half of the twentieth century Einstein's relativity transformed the concept of perceived reality, and in so doing changed the role of science and the scientific community in society. He exposed the degree to which everyday perceptions of objective reality have compromised the formulation of scientific constructs. Yaron Ezrahi observes:

> the very idea that clocks and measuring rods can change their behavior in a universe of high velocities seemed unsettling to the notion that science, as a mirror of external reality that we commonly experience, culturally and epistemologically validates the public realm of the civil society. The idea of an infinite number of objective realities erodes the social authority of science as a set of fixed universal standards that commensurate our cognitive constructions of reality in everyday experiences and ensure a domain in which the social and the political enterprise can rest on the solid basis of personal trust (261).

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By contrast, intellectuals such as the empiricist John Dewey, the linguist C.K. Ogden, and the literary critic I.A. Richards continued to foster a belief in the remedial effects of scientific "reality" on what Ezrahi calls a "proliferation of fantasies, metaphysical ideas and abstractions" (266). Their belief that language, working in direct conjunction with concrete, objective reality, would serve to restore responsible discourse was not a belief entirely shared by Einstein, who insisted that words and concepts needed to be disciplined by experiments. He did, however, consider it the physicists' responsibility to society to evaluate "the problem of analyzing the nature of everyday thinking" (59).

Lawrence Durrell consciously and enthusiastically welcomed the literary possibilities of the new physics, its philosophy, and the experimental application of relativity to metaphorical and linguistic aspects of the novel form. The nature of Durrell's four-dimensional "word continuum" is best described by the character of Pursewarden in Clea, the final, least relativistic, and most clearly narrative of the novels comprising the Quartet:

> ... if you wished to be – I do not say original but contemporary – you might try a four-card trick in the form of a novel; passing a common axis through four stories, say, and dedicating each to one of the four winds of heaven. A continuum, forsooth, embodying not a temps retrouvé but a temps delivré. The curvature of space itself would give you a stereoscopic narrative, while human personality seen across a continuum would become perhaps prismatic. Who can say? I throw the idea out. I can imagine a form which, if satisfied, might raise in human terms the problems of causality or indeterminacy ... nothing very recherché, either. Just an ordinary girl meets boy story. But tackled in this way you would not, like most of your contemporaries, be drowsily cutting along a dotted line (Clea126).

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Pursewarden sees this as the antidote to what he perceives as the utter stagnation of English literature, hampered as it is by the weight of history, linear thought processes and anachronistic forms:

> It is not really art which is at issue, it is ourselves. Shall we always be content with the ancient tinned salad of the subsidised novel? Or the tired ice-cream of poems which cry themselves to sleep in the refrigerators of the mind? If it were possible to adopt a bolder scansion, a racier rhythm, we might all breathe more freely! ... Art occurs at the point where a form is sincerely honored by an awakened spirit (Clea 118).

Darley, another character, embodies the young writer's struggle to find a literary voice in an environment where the evolutionary process of the artist is complicated by the fact that the elements of the new literature advocated by Pursewarden never seem to coalesce into the autonomous whole indicative of a mature artist; "mature," of course, in the traditional definition of artistic maturity. Darley says to Pursewarden: "I somehow can't match the truth to the illusions which are necessary to art without the gap showing – you know, like an unbasted seam. But an artist who can't solder the elements together falls short somehow" (Clea 6). Pursewarden replies from the standpoint of the post-Einsteinian artist:

> I don't see why. In fact this very discovery should encourage rather than hamper you. I mean about the mutability of all truth. Each fact can have a thousand motivations, all equally valid, and each fact a thousand faces. So many truths which have little to do with fact! Your duty is to hunt them down. At each moment of time all multiplicity waits at your elbow (Clea 64).

Durrell's relativistic concerns extend far beyond purely philosophical issues, however, and he uses the language and metaphors of modern physics to express psychological and emotional states in a new way. For example, Darley uses what is clearly

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physics-derived vocabulary in a discussion of the importance of observation based upon the model of scientific experiment:

> I also saw that lover and loved, observer and observed, throw down a field about each other ... They then infer the properties of their love, judging it from this narrow field with its huge margins of unknown ("the refraction"), and proceed to refer it to a generalized conception of something constant in its qualities and universal in its operation. How valuable a lesson this was, both to art and to life! (Clea 47)

Elsewhere there are references to the "specific gravity" of an individual's life, as well as the "stereoscopic narrative" of the writer using relativity as a structural foundation for the novel. Clearly, Durrell attempts to assimilate not just the philosophy and structure of relativity, but the language and imagery as well. Robert March comments that "the price of assimilating relativity is a lot of outrage to our common sense" (126) and the resultant psychological and intellectual discomfort of this process resonates profoundly in Durrell's Quartet. There is frequent symbolic imagery portraying exactly this existential despair: "We yawned, it was cold. Shivering, we turned to one another, feeling suddenly orphaned in this benighted world between light and darkness." (Clea 19) Darley asks in Clea, "Were there, then, still gods left to invoke?" (19) and professes an acute awareness of a "troubling counterpoint of the known and the unknown" (20).

Clea is the most specific volume of the quartet in terms of allowing the reader access to Durrell's intentions insofar as assimilation of relativistic ideas and metaphors is concerned. Through various characters Durrell's exploration of relativity becomes linked to psychology and to the matrix of the novel form. The nature of time, its effect upon

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varying levels of human interaction, its treatment in an artistic context, and the redefinition of time in light of relativity are the axes upon which the Quartet is constructed, and as far as possible Durrell remains faithful to the technical dictates of Einstein's original concept. In the process of translation from a purely scientific idea to a literary medium, some distortion is inevitable, and through Darley Durrell acknowledges awareness of the inherent difficulty of this transposition:

> No sooner had I embalmed one aspect of [the past] in words than the intrusion of new knowledge disrupted the frame of reference, everything flew asunder, only to reassemble again in unforseen, unpredictable patterns.... "To rework reality" I had written somewhere; temeritous, presumptuous words indeed – for it is reality which works and reworks us on its slow wheel. I had now come face to face with the nature of time, that ailment of the human psyche. I had been forced to admit defeat on paper (Clea 4).

And further,

> If I have spoken of time it is because the writer I was becoming was learning to inhabit those deserted spaces which time misses— beginning to live between the ticks of the clock, so to speak. The continuous present, which is the real history of that collective anecdote, the human mind; when the past is dead and the future represented only by desire and fear, what of the adventive moment which can't be measured, can't be dismissed? (Clea 6).

Finally,

> Once you become aware of the operation of a time which is not calendar-time you become some sort of ghost. In this other domain I could hear the echoes of words uttered long since in the past by other voices. Balthazar saying: "This world represents the promise of a unique happiness which we are not well enough equipped to grasp."(Clea 16).

Durrell deliberately destroys the perspective established by a linear-temporal system, replacing it with a series of impressionistic images that vacillate between time frames, and are taken from multiple points of view of the various characters. Working from the general

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concept of relativity, Durrell's Quartet exists in a continuous present where characters are not fixed in space-time and are therefore neither subjective nor objective in their interactions. Durrell departs from the idea of subject-object relationships through repudiation of a solid state universe, and the achronology of events in space-time. In literary terms the result is that to a certain extent form actually becomes content.

Although this effect is certainly not in itself innovative – Joyce, Proust, Woolf and Bergson had done the same – there is a difference in that Durrell begins and ends with relativity as an identifiable unifying premise. My discussion will demonstrate how Einsteinian relativity and its corollaries both enrich and inform readings of Durrell's Quartet and indicate the ways in which relativity has been manipulated as a structural and thematic device to reveal the modes and motivations underlying scientific responses to twentieth century literature, and vice versa. By critically studying Durrell's use and understanding of relativity we see how non-traditional sources may be significant in examining literature and may give us a new, freshly enlightened perspective. There is a viable foundation for the creation of a science-oriented literary genre.

Furthermore, the dissertation will establish that Durrell's use of relativity, and even quantum theory, produces a postmodern ethos in the Quartet. For example, the concept of a "word continuum" as defined by Durrell parallels the postmodern concept of anti-linear narrative structure, as well as the dissolution of the reader-text boundary. In fact, Einsteinian relativity and the development of postmodernism in literature share several common features, and it is evident that Einstein's theory – one of the three great revelations in contemporary science, the others being Darwin's theory of natural selection

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and Freud's development of psychoanalysis – exercised profound influence upon both the theory and practice of literary art. Largely because of Einstein's theories, says physicist I.I. Rabi, "science, which was hardly more than an intellectual interest in Franklin's time, now occupies a large part of our intellectual horizon, and is basic to our industry, our health, our wealth, and our national survival" (112). Moreover, he notes, science in general is the great common and universal possession and expression of humanity in this century (55).

A discussion of relativity will reveal that Einstein destroyed accepted notions of reality and replaced them with a view of the universe that seemed both contradictory to perceived experience, and disturbingly insubstantial. Postmodernism in literature has, among other elements, relativity as its precursor in that literature was compelled to reassess the very universe it had sought to both reproduce and reflect. Even the interiors of the human mind were no longer sacrosanct, since relativity defies the reliability of perception itself. The resultant disorientation manifested itself in literary experimentalism and a restless departure from modernist structuralism. In addition, an element of nihilism appeared (developed to a high degree in Beckett, for example) as well as an intensely self-referential, even self-parodic, quality because Einstein, and his literary followers, had shown that external points of reference are unreliable indicators of what is "real" or "true."

Postmodernism can in some measure be perceived as both a manifestation of, and a reaction against, the pervasive and powerful influence of Einsteinian relativity and the philosophical shifts it catalyzed. The implications of relativity subvert the security of the artist because on a profound level they alter the very meaning of being-ness without offering a reassuring alternative. Since many of the rules governing the definition of reality

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cease to apply, the artist must search for meaning and new definitions of reality that coalesce with the Einsteinian landscape. In attempting to define the tenets of postmodernist fiction, Ortega y Gasset posits: "to stylize means to deform reality, to derealize; style involves dehumanization. And vice versa, there is no other means of stylizing except by dehumanization" (28). Later he says of postmodern characterization, "Any reference, allusion, narration only emphasizes the absence of what it alludes to. Things that are need not be related " (62). Richard Poirier discusses the role of self-parody in postmodernist literature. He points out that echoes of post-Einsteinian disenfranchisement from linearity and perceptual unity are found in literary constructs:

> In the literature of self-parody efforts to project a self of historical consequence are largely missing or the object of mockery. Plots seldom issue ... from the interplay of and pressure of individual human actions, and can be said to exist ... prior to the book. Plot ... becomes a self-generating, even possibly self-generated formula of myths and conspiracies whose source is as mysterious as the source of life itself, and within its characters try, often vainly, to find a role, or to find any possible human tie not implicated in the impersonality of plot (36).

Postmodernism shares with Einsteinian relativity many characteristics, the former being to a great degree derivative from the latter. However, postmodern authors – the canon of which is difficult to ascertain since it differs according to critic and time period, and is as yet too historically immediate to establish – tend to exhibit relativity-related qualities. Among these are: structural fragmentation, simultaneity (evidenced by a concern with impermanence, transience, and absurd time), the City as Cosmos, matter disappearing into concept, entropy of meaning, and abstraction taken to the limit. In addition, there are many distinctive elements of postmodernist fiction that can be said to result from

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psychological or philosophical reactions either for or against the new physics. These include: moral pluralism, black humor and apocalypticism, cultural alienation as a recurring theme, counter-Western mysticism, end-game strategies, and what Ihab Hassan terms "neo-surrealist modes" (57), radical empiricism, and an end to traditional aesthetics. as well as a heavily post-existential ethos. In a post-Einsteinian universe, fantasy and reality may conceivably meet in a fusion of forms and a confusion of realms. There is a return to fabulation embracing both lavish hyper-textuality and minimalist forms, often juxtaposed.

In much of the literature that can be characterized as postmodern, there is an intense exploration of the various aspects of existence which are only apparently substantive, as well as alignment of elements whose juxtaposition would seem ludicrous at best in a pre-Einsteinian context.

It should be emphasized that in no way is it my intention to suggest that scientific, and specifically Einsteinian, concerns outweigh the validity of other influences with regard to postmodern literary expression. It is, however, my contention that inasmuch as postmodernism can be characterized as an outgrowth of, or reaction to, modernism in literature, Durrell's use of Einsteinian relativity in the Quartet establishes him as what I call a "bridge writer" between the two periods, the Quartet ultimately revealing itself to be more postmodernist than modernist in nature.

The dissertation will establish the connection between Einstein's relativity and Durrell's Quartet on the one hand, and, on the other hand, how this connection places the

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tetralogy within the parameters of literary postmodernism, which also exhibits many of the elements of a post-Einsteinian ethos.

On a more general level, the dissertation proposes that in specific instances, such as the advent of relativistic physics, scientific paradigms are of such a revolutionary nature that they exist as autonomous cultural forces distinct from, and extending beyond, their scientific importance, a phenomenon upon which Thomas Kuhn elaborates when he discusses the importance of what he calls "perceptual transformations" (112). As such they have the power to inform and institute change in other disciplines, whether that change involves an incorporation of, or reaction against, the new precepts. By this definition science-derived literature is as legitimate a genre as absurdist drama, satirical poetry or the feminist novel. In its own way, and by its own standards, it is as valid as any of these. The primary objective of this dissertation is to isolate and define the exact nature of relativity's role as both source and influence for Durrell's Quartet.

There is enormous potential for further development and critical study of direct relationships forged between scientific ideology and twentieth century literature. With a highly concentrated body of scientific knowledge, and a rapidly increasing rate of scientific advancement, there is a need for literature that effectively assimilates and communicates the ideals and language of science, placing scientific enlightenment aesthetically and intellectually within reach of every reader. Insofar as his use of relativity is concerned, Durrell's message in The Alexandria Quartet, delivered through both the philosophizing of Pursewarden and the artistic evolution of Darley, is that it is time to re-evaluate what it is

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that constitutes art in literature, since the more traditional forms and philosophies are by themselves no longer sufficient.

If greater appreciation needs to be cultivated for the value of scientific ideology in literature, then in their elegance, humanism, and rich, abstract mythology the ideas of great scientific figures like Einstein represent the best that such cross-application has to offer. With Durrell's integration of relativity and quantum reality into The Alexandria Quartet we see the resolution of art-science polarity in literature whose merit derives not only from its literary significance, but also from its significance as an experiment in the creation of a science derived literary matrix. Acceptance of its value requires broadening the definition of literary art, and this can only be accomplished by first understanding both the art in science and the science in art.

Irrespective of technical difficulties, the marriage of Einstein's relativity and Durrell's Alexandrian fable reveals that despite differences in systems of thought, environment and vocabulary with which the writer and scientist work, their worlds intersect and integrate where the most important motives for human endeavor are concerned: imagination, creativity, exploration, and the ongoing search for understanding of man in the universe.

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CHAPTER II Creating Quantum Fiction: Relativity, Quantum Reality and the Alexandria Quartet

The abstract nature of relativity is undoubtedly a significant factor in its absence from most of modern British literature. Thorough understanding of the mathematical intricacies is often difficult even for theoretical physicists; it takes several years to become comfortable, not only with the technical language involved, but also with the altered concept of objective reality presented by relativity. Some literary artists, most notably Lawrence Durrell, have attempted to graft relativity's scientific structure directly onto the literary environment of the novel. The result in The Alexandria Quartet* is an innovative use of scientific metaphors, relativity-related imagery, and narratological devices; for example, Durrell's use of four different, but thematically interwoven, novels derived from Einstein's concept of a four-dimensional universe comprising three spatial dimensions, and one temporal dimension. The result is what Durrell calls a "word continuum." For the most part, however, the point of intersection between relativistic physics and literature remains one of ideology. However, the attempted assimilation of relativity to literature is a significant development in literary creativity because it represents an effort to produce art that actively incorporates science as a source of creative expression. This is a

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* hereafter referred to as the Quartet

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particularly difficult task when the scientific field being incorporated is theoretical physics, since for the most part we are dealing with two completely different languages, the one consisting of words and sentences, the other of numbers and equations. Added to this is the fact that Einsteinian relativity demands redefinition of many ideas and assumptions that both fields do share; it becomes easy to see how, in the process of translating from one language to the other, something is lost in the translation. Within the field of physics itself this is sometimes a problem. In fact, Einstein's use of a simple mathematical conversion called the "Galilei transformation" to demonstrate part of his theory may also be used to represent the idea of transforming one set of variables onto another by taking them from one "plane" or coordinate system (the field of relativistic physics) and placing them in another parallel, but generally unrelated, "plane" or coordinate system (the "field" of literature). In his popularized exposition of relativity Einstein observes that there is a "perfectly definite transformation law for the space-time magnitudes of an event when changing over from one body of reference to another"(31). He then elaborates:

> An event, wherever it may have taken place, would be fixed in space with respect to K [a Euclidean planar coordinate system] by the three perpendiculars x, y, and z on the coordinate planes, and with regard to time by a time value t. Relative to K^1 [a parallel plane, but at a different point in space], the same event would be fixed in respect of space and time by corresponding values x^1, y^1, z^1 and t^1 , which of course are not identical with x,y,z and t. (Relativity 32)

With this in mind, it is not surprising that when Durrell constructed his Quartet, a four-part word continuum, the degree to which he achieved successful integration of relativistic ideas, language and metaphors with more traditional literary elements, such as narrative progression or classical constructs of time and place, cannot readily be quantified.

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Nevertheless, the previously mentioned intersection point between relativistic physics and literature exists where the author who joins the two realms explores, and seeks answers to, some of the fundamental issues underlying the very essence of human existence. That such an explorer approaches this goal from what appears to be diametrically opposed frameworks does not alter the fact that the impetus is the same for both fields. Mathematical abstractions aside, Einstein's development of both the special and general theories of relativity, as well as his work on the principle of simultaneity and in the field of quantum mechanics, all derived from some basic and long-debated issues: the nature of reality, time, and space, the mechanism of perception, the perception of reality on both an individual basis and in relation to other individuals, the nature of truth, and the truth about nature. Einstein described the theory of relativity as "a valuable heuristic aid in the search for general laws of nature." (Relativity 43) This stemmed from his conviction that "classical mechanics affords an insufficient foundation for the physical description of all natural phenomena" (Relativity 18). Regarding the nature of absolute truths, Einstein uses the example of the rigidly axiomatic field of Euclidean geometry to warn against seeking the evidence for a definitive concept of truth in nature solely through an understanding of mathematics:

> A proposition is then correct ("true") when it has been derived in the recognized manner from the axioms. The question of the "truth" of the individual propositions is thus reduced to one of the "truth" of the axioms. Now it has long been known that this last question is not only unanswerable by the methods of geometry, but that it is in itself entirely without meaning.
>
> The concept "true" does not tally the assertions of pure geometry, because by the word "true" we are eventually in the habit of designating always the correspondence with a real object; geometry, however, is not concerned with

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> the relation of the ideas involved in it to objects of experience but only with the logical connection of these ideas among themselves (Relativity 7).

He concludes that: "Geometrical ideas correspond to more or less exact objects in nature, and these last are undoubtedly the exclusive cause of the genesis of those ideas " (Relativity 7). In Out Of My Later Years Einstein takes the issue of truth out of the realm of pure science and draws a parallel between axiomatic scientific truths and the axioms circumscribing more humanistic types of truth:

> For pure logic all axioms are arbitrary, including the axioms of ethics. But they are by no form a psychological of view. They are derived from our inborn tendencies to avoid pain and annihilation, and from the accumulated emotional reactions of individuals to the behavior of their neighbors.
>
> ***
>
> Ethical axioms are found and tested not very differently from the axioms of science. Truth is what stands the test of experience ("The Laws of Science and the Laws of Ethics" 115).

Jacob Bronowski discusses this aspect of truth in relation to a broader sociological context, concluding that "the sanction of experienced fact as a face of truth is a profound subject, and the mainspring which has moved our civilization since the Renaissance" (29).

For Einstein the search for truth was based upon his conviction that it would be found through the resolution of several disparate elements (for example time, space, and perception of reality) in a single unified theory. It was this quest that generated his formulation of general relativity, which explains the behavior of accelerated systems of time, space, and matter, out of the special theory of relativity, which explains the behavior of inertial systems only. In this respect Einstein's contribution was formally simple, but conceptually profound, involving the modification of classical time and space constructs. By seeking unity Einstein altered the definition of reality.

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A few years after his development of special relativity, Hermann Minkowski presented the organic mathematical formulation that gave the language of science to Einstein's theoretical work, the four-dimensional space-time model. The relationship between space and time measurements of two observers of an object or event, each moving differently (that is, having disparate scales of time, velocity and distance) was analogous to a rotation of four dimensions. In terms of physics, this meant the resolution of the classical principle of relativity *vis a vis* mechanics with the laws of electrodynamics. This was special relativity. However, a new paradox was created by all this. Newtonian mechanics demanded the truth of absolute simultaneity; that is, definitions of the forces operating between distant bodies (such as the earth and the sun, for example) were dependent on their instantaneous distance from each other. But in the context of relativity this would differ from observer to observer. Therefore, mechanics needed further modification if Einstein's space-time was to prevail. In illuminating the nature of this new dilemma Peter Bergmann explains:

> Relativistic mechanics was designed to bridge the gap partially by making mass velocity dependent – hence the proportionality between mass and energy – and by modifying the force. These changes had no effect, however, on the dependence of the action at finite distances on absolute simultaneity. A relativistic theory of gravitation would require replacing the Newtonian action by the intermediary fields. Hence the need for a relativistic gravitational field (29).

Through a series of intricate arguments Einstein once again sought to unify the variables using the universally accepted concept of consistent acceleration of all bodies within a given gravitational field; on the earth's surface, for example, this is consistently 9.8 m/s^2. There is no analogous parameter for bodies in an electric field, where the force acting on a

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body depends on the body's electric charge, and its acceleration on the ratio of the body's charge to its mass (e/m). From these differences Einstein deduced that if gravitational acceleration is the same for all bodies, then it vanishes completely in situ for an observer who himself undergoes the same acceleration. This leads to the notion of a free-falling as opposed to an inertial frame of reference. The primary difference between the two concepts is this: whereas an inertial frame of reference presumably extends over the whole universe, a free-falling frame is defined only locally, in a sufficiently small region. An astronaut ... will perceive no gravitational field in his freefalling vehicle , but distant objects appear to be accelerated relative to himself " (Bergmann 30). This line of reasoning eventually led Einstein to replace the space-time of the special theory of relativity with a more general, hence more unified, geometric concept, the general theory of relativity; this was Einstein's concept of the gravitational field. As special relativity had found mathematical expression in Minkowski's space-time model, so was general relativity given a voice by a geometric construct known as Riemannian space-time which, while locally resembling the properties of special relativity, is in fact on a much larger scale and more complex, given that it is a curved manifold (Bergmann 31).

Einstein's continued refinement of his theory included his attempt to incorporate quantum physics as well as mechanics and electrodynamics. This "unified field theory" was an ongoing focus of Einstein's work from the early 1920s until his death. During this time he, along with several other physicists in the field, continued to develop new geometric constructs to explain the deterministic laws of general relativity. He realized that nature is not purely gravitational, but allows for other types of forces as well; yet from the

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standpoint of general relativity gravitation is essential to give space and time their geometric structure and all other forces are gratuitous. Moreover, Einstein decried the overuse of geometry to explain the structure of nature, and yet, as Bergmann observes:

> In order to formulate and to survey such possibilities, a geometric formulation is often a real help. Essentially, mathematicians and physicists, too, proceed intuitively when they endeavor to create new concepts and relations. Geometry often helps them to "think in images." Thus, geometry may serve as a heuristic device. That role may not exhaust its possibilities, but it is a major one (33).

The high degree of abstraction necessary for extending one's understanding beyond the fairly simple premise of relativity to the heady stratosphere of its many variations and derivations does not preclude recognition that in every instance the ultimate goal is the same: to unify a seemingly limitless number of factors under a single causal law. The language of this process is mathematics, since imagination eventually proves unequal to the task of conceptualization. It is a language with many dialects: Minkowski space-time. Riemann four-dimensional geometry, Weyl geometry, Carton geometry of parallel vector transport, Kaluza's proposal of five-dimensional geometry, Grassmann algebras of hypercomplex numbers, Brans and Dicke tensorscalar theory, and Penrose's twister formalism. As Bergmann points out:

> In twentieth-century theoretical physics, a number of major areas have emerged, each dominated by a closely reasoned and closely linked set of laws. These areas have emerged in response to the human quest for understanding, for comprehending the individual event as an instance of an overriding general principle. Albert Einstein created one such area, the theory of gravitation, and he did so by deepening our grasp of the nature of space and time, the scaffolding on which all of physical science takes place (37).

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When Coleridge wanted to define beauty he was always led back to the profound thought that beauty is "unity in variety." Similarly, Bronowski, for whom science is "the organization of our knowledge in such a way that it commands more of the hidden potential in nature" (7), also asserts that: "The progress of science is the discovery at each step of a new order which gives unity to what had long seemed unlike" (15). Einstein himself discusses his passion for unification in his essay "The Fundamentals of Theoretical Physics":

> Science is an attempt to make the chaotic diversity of our sense-experience correspond to the logically uniform system of thought. In this system single experiences must be correlated with the theoretic structure in such a way that the resulting condition is unique and convincing (Out of My Later Years 98).

Furthermore,

> from the very beginning there has always been present the attempt to find a unifying basis for all these single sciences, consisting of a minimum of concepts and fundamental relationships, from which all the concepts and relationships of the single disciplines might be derived by logical processes. This is what we mean by the search for a foundation for the whole of physics. The confident belief that this ultimate goal will be reached is the chief source of the passionate devotion which has always animated the researcher (99).

Einstein's quest for objective truth through unity in the laws of nature is of course also very much about the nature of objective reality itself. The effect of relativity in this regard was to change previously held definitions of the fabric of reality; namely, time and space. After Einstein's work it became clear that there can be considerable disagreement between what is and what is perceived to be, which leads to further upheaval with respect to questions of determining the nature and function of perception in a relativistic universe.

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Here, relativity resulted in profound reverberations of a more philosophical nature.

Christopher Cauldwell notes:

> each revelation of a relativity in dimensions was regarded as a crisis which could only be resolved by restoring normality on a new plane – in other words, by again putting physics on an absolute basis. Relativity in dimensions or qualities regarded as a kind of unreality and illusory subjectivity about them, which is opposed to the absolute character of objective reality. Absoluteness and relativity are regarded as mutually exclusive qualities (18).

Indeed, Einstein himself underscored this point in "The Theory Of Relativity":

> The name "theory of relativity" is connected with the fact that motion from the point of view of possible experience always appears as the relative motion of one object with respect to another ... Motion is never observable as "motion with respect to space" or, as it has been expressed, as "absolute motion." The "principle of relativity" in its widest sense is contained in the statement: The totality of physical phenomena is of such a character that it gives no basis for the introduction of the concept of "absolute motion;" or, shorter but less precise: There is no absolute motion (41).

It was previously thought that science deals in absolute, knowable truths, "objective and imperishable qualities" (Wheelis 68), and provable laws governing existence in the known universe. Relativity, however, asks that such perceptions be abandoned because they are simply not so. Allen Wheelis eloquently presents the dilemma in the following manner:

> Along comes the gentle Einstein in baggy pants, with soulful eyes and uncut hair, and takes away not only extension, but also that time by which we set so much store. There are two parties, he reminds us, to every observation, the observer as well as the observed. And where should the observer stand to get an accurate view of those primary, objective, and imperishable qualities? It turns out that there is no right place to stand, no place at all, in fact, which we can know is at rest. Measuring rods collapse, miles shrink down to inches, clocks are frozen in ancient ice; an eternity may elapse between this sip of coffee and the next, and we shall never know (70).

The implications of this strange theory are enormously disruptive to our views of the world as we know it. Relativity undercuts the very essence of one of the governing

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principles of the natural world: causality. The paradox of post-Einsteinian causality is that in a universe where relativity predominates, the temporal sequence of events might be found to vary dependent upon the frame of reference used. It would be possible for occurrence A to precede occurrence B in one time frame, whereas the inverse could be the case , and equally "true" in another. In other words, what appeared to be the cause of an event in one frame would appear to be the result in another. Therefore, since "earlier" and "later" obviously become relative concepts, causal laws cannot be said to be invariant and so cannot be accepted among the true laws of classical physics.

This paradox has a solution, however. Access to the equations and technical fine points of the special theory of relativity reveal that not only are causal laws invariant with respect to inertial systems of reference, but that the theory itself is causal in the traditional sense of the term. Still, we are disturbed because the question of causality is a deeply ingrained aspect of the human psycho-historical mosaic. It encompasses not only the physical dimensions of our perceptual and experiential life, but extends beyond into moral and philosophical realms as well. Furthermore, as Bertrand Russell points out,

> the notion of cause is part of the apparatus of common sense. I do not think it would be true that common sense regards objects as the causes of our perceptions; it would not, unless challenged, think of bringing in causation in this connection ... The idea of universal causation, and of causation divorced from purpose, belongs to a later stage of mental development, and marks the beginnings of philosphy and science (150).

Causality, in Einstein's view, was that which would be arrived at through relativity. and in an even more autonomous form, the unified field theory.

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The nature of time is yet another important factor in the causal matrix, and is perhaps the most significant in terms of its far-reaching applications in other fields, such as philosophy and literature. John Sullivan makes the observation that as science revealed the nature of reality to be a world of material particles moving through space and time in accordance with mathematical laws of probability, the concept of time itself was altered: "With the new notion of time the future, being non-existent, had no influence on present happenings. The cause of anything happening now was found to be in the past" (209). An immediate dichotomy arose out of this revelation: there is an enormous distance between the "true" definition of temporal reality as determined by science and what we perceive, through psychological processes, as the nature of time. The result of this disparity is two-fold; on the one hand the definitions of time circumscribed by physics become abstract beyond the limits of human comprehension, while on the other hand human experience and vocabulary become incapable of accurately expressing these abstractions, leading to an inevitable sense of alienation between reality and experience. As Thomas Kuhn observes, it conflicts with "a dominant epistemology that takes knowledge to be a construction placed directly upon raw sense data by the mind" (96). John Sullivan further illuminates the implications of this divisive concept:

> our notions of precise spatio and temporal location do, to some extent, break down when we consider the ultimate particles of matter. The notions are abstractions from gross experience. It is not surprising, therefore, that they turn out to be not quite suitable to a different range of experience (294).

And yet,

> it is impossible for us, constituted as we are, to escape from spatio-temporal coordinates. We cannot think in other terms, we cannot ever speak the new

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> language which would be required. Physics expressed in quanta of action would convey nothing to our minds. We are therefore obliged to submit to the necessity of describing reality in terms of space and time, we are compelled to use unsuitable, and in certain circumstances meaningless, coordinates. All the quantum difficulties arise from the fact that we have not recognized the limitations of the spatio-temporal description of ultimate units. Once this has been fully apprehended the results appear natural and inevitable (283).

Not long after Einstein published the special theory of relativity, Minkowski posited a mathematical formulation for a spacetime continuum, a four-dimensional reality: three dimensions of space and one of time. Thus space and time were conceptually wedded, and were considered an autonomous entity, of which time is the larger part. In Space Time and Deity Samuel Alexander discusses the effects of four-dimensionality on the perceptual process:

> Time, with its distinctive features corresponds to the three dimensions of Space, and in a manner of speech Time does with this one-dimensional order cover and embrace the three dimensions of Space, and is not additional to them. To use a violent phrase, it is, spatially and temporally, voluminous. When we proceed to speak of Space and Time as continuous wholes and distinguishable into points or instants, we are going beyond what we learn through sense and employing ideas, or what are sometimes called intellectual constructions, and are also employing thoughts in the special and proper sense of concepts (40).

Sullivan adds to this the idea that in the natural world no distinction is made between space and time in the absolute sense; this separation is a "psychological peculiarity" of human perceptual machinery. Moreover, he says,

> There is nothing absolute about space or time ... different observers make different estimates of the space and of the time separating two events. But there is a certain relation that they are all agreed on – a relation referring directly to the four-dimensional reality (81).

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In writing The Alexandria Quartet, Lawrence Durrell tried to construct four-dimensional literature based upon the empirical scientific definition of time derived from relativity, as opposed to those based on subjective perception. In A Key To Modern British Poetry he discusses the literary assimilation of relativity and its corollary, quantum physics, *vis a vis* the constructs of modern poetry:

> I am not suggesting that modern poetry is constructed to illuminate quantum theory, but I do suggest that it unconsciously reproduces something like the space-time continuum in the way that it uses words and phrases; and the way that its forms are cyclic rather than extended. Time, both in the novel and in the poem, has taken on a different aspect (178).

This awareness of time is addressed again and again throughout the Quartet, where the concept of time-reality is presented as a four-dimensional fabric whose threads are symbolized by the characters and the central unifying image of reality, Alexandria itself. In Clea, Pursewarden, the dissolute English poet says: "Between infinity and eternity stretches the thin hard tightrope human beings must walk, joined at the waist" (133). And Darley, a young writer struggling towards artistic maturity, notes upon returning to Alexandria after time spent away from the city:

> all at once it seemed that past and present had joined again without any divisions in it, and that all my memories and impressions had ordered themselves into one complete pattern whose metaphor was always the shining city of the disinherited ... (81).

Time is not only four-dimensional, but cyclical as well, according to Darley:

> I thought too of the long journey we made from this very bed, since last we lay here together, through so many climates and countries only to return once more to the starting point again, captured once more by the gravitational field of the city (89).

Until finally:

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> So the city claimed me once more – the same city made now somehow less poignant and less terrifying than it had been in the past by new displacements in time... I had time to experience both a sense of familiarity and one of alienation, measuring stability against change, past against present tense (Clea 93).

As is true in relativistic physics, Durrell's experimentation with time in the Quartet involves a concomitant value shift in the meaning of reality, which must now be redefined in the context of his spatio-temporal word continuum. The search for a definition of reality through language is an integral feature of all literature, of course, but to attempt such a definition using the concepts of modern physics was an innovation on Durrell's part. By exploring and manipulating time and space in the complicated structures and sub-structures of the Quartet, he also reveals the infinite variety inherent in what appears to be reality, and thus the quicksilver mutability of those things – both ideological and concrete – that, individually or collectively, we consider to be Truth. The dictates of Einsteinian relativity assure us that we exist in a universe of shifting sands, that time and space, being constructs of the human psyche, are not at all what we believe them to be, that in fact nothing is as it appears, and therefore to discuss the nature of reality is a pointless exercise in a universe containing an infinite number of realities, all equally valid. The Alexandria Quartet attempts through Durrell's intricate weaving of symbols, metaphors, times, places, and characterizations, to express relativity's ethos, to present time (ancient Alexandria versus modern Alexandria) and space (the inhabited places of the Quartet's characters) as a compact reality embodying a multitude of simultaneous realities. Past, present and future become each other, flow into and out of each other with each shift in perspective initiated by a different character who perceives the time-shift continuum of any given event from a

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distinctive vantage point. One effect of this is that the reader is drawn into the peculiar matrix of "realities" created by Durrell's characters, each of whose interpretation of the "reality" of the unfolding events seems to be the "right" one, existing autonomously and simultaneously and integratively with the other "realities" in the Quartet, like pieces of a puzzle. In Time, Space and Deity Samuel Alexander discusses the nature of reality as conceived in an Einsteinian universe, and similarly, as it may be interpreted in the universe bounded by Durrell's Alexandria:

> The objection may be made, how can reality contain at this moment the past, for the past is past and exists no longer? But the difficulty is only apparent. It arises from identifying reality with the present or actual reality; it assumes in fact that Time is not real. The past event, it is true, does not exist now, and if existence is taken to be present existence, the past clearly does not exist. But if we avoid this error and take time seriously, the past possesses such reality as belongs to the past, that is, to what is earlier than the point of reference; it does not exist now but it did exist then, and its reality is to have existed then. As to the later, or future, there is at bottom no greater difference in speaking of the future as being real and existing really than there is in respect of the real existence of the past (71).

The mysterious city itself embodies these ideas, being an icon of both past and present "reality." It represents the ancient and metaphysical Egypt wedded in space-time to the modern and relativistic Egypt of the twentieth century. As such it is the ideal setting for Durrell's explorations of reality and the meaning of truth.

Through the character of Pursewarden Durrell clearly addresses the reader concerning his relativistic interests. As Carl Bode notes: "Pursewarden acts as the custodian of what Durrell calls "the universal human anecdote." Indeed, he sees for Durrell" ("A Guide to Alexandria," in Lawrence Durrell 211). Because of this it is through Pursewarden's often lengthy commentaries that the reader receives guidance towards

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understanding of the peculiar Einsteinian world of the Quartet and its characters. It is Pursewarden who explains:

> the symbolism contained in form and pattern is only a frame of reference through which, as in a mirror, one may glimpse the idea of a universe in love with itself. Then like a babe in arms you will "milk the universe at every breath"! We must learn to read between the lines, between the lives (Clea 134).

And then,

> The struggle is always for greater consciousness. But alas! Civilizations die in the measure because they become conscious of themselves. They realize, they lose heart, the propulsion of the unconscious motive is no longer there. Desperately they begin to copy themselves in the mirror. It is no use. But surely there is a catch in all this? Yes. Time is the catch! Space is a concrete idea, but Time is abstract. In the scar tissue of Proust's great poem you see that so clearly; his work is the great academy of the time consciousness. But being unwilling to mobilize the meaning of time he was driven to fall back on memory, the ancestor of hope (Clea 135).

Furthermore, he introduces the question of the artist's role in a universe redefined through space-time and concludes:

> the so-called act of living is really an act of the imagination. The world – which we always visualize as the "outside world" – yields only to self-exploration! Faced by this cruel, yet necessary paradox, the poet finds himself growing gills and a tail, the better to swim against the currents of en-lightenment. What appears to be an arbitrary act of violence is precisely the opposite, for by reversing process in this way, he unites the rushing, heedless, stream of humanity to the still, tranquil, odourless, tasteless plenum from which its own motive essence is derived... If he were to abandon his role all hope of gaining a purchase on the slippery surface of reality would be lost, and everything in nature would disappear! (Clea 144).

Another significant application of Einsteinian relativity adapted by Durrell is the relationship between subject and object, which in a relativistic sense becomes increasingly arbitrary within the matrix of space-time. Because time in such a matrix does not only

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move forward, but backwards, sideways, and up and down, the location of a character in space-time essentially defines his perspective on events. If he moves in any direction time, his world, and he himself, will vary. As Pursewarden says, "Two paces east or west and the whole picture is changed" (Clea 181). The result is that the demarcation line between subject and object becomes obsolete and, as Carl Bode notes, "We are no longer sure that anything is objectively real. We are the ones who comprehend it, but the very comprehending changes – and in consequence changes for us the object we have been comprehending. Absolutes are gone" ("A Guide To Alexandria" 216). In the Quartet this relationship, or rather, antirelationship, is true not only for the reader and his response to, or interaction with, the characters, but also in the interactions between the characters themselves, as well as the perspective of the reader as he observes these interactions. Durrell's skillful blurring of the line separating subject and object extends to a parallel, and related, blurring of the boundaries of reality and credibility. We see throughout the books of the Quartet many events of a metaphysical and fantastical nature that test even the most suspended disbelief. One such event is the impalement of a dervish at an Egyptian holy festival, as witnessed by the character Mountolive:

> Across the darkness I tracked down a group of dervishes in a lighted corner between two great embrasures. It was the end of a dance and they were turning one of their member into a human chandelier, covered in burning candles, the hot wax dripping all over him. His eyes were vague and tranced. Last of all comes an old boy and drives a dagger through both cheeks. On each end of the dagger he hoists a candlestick with a branch of lighted candles in each. Transfixed thus the boy rises slowly to his toes and revolves in a dance – like a tree on fire. After the dance, they simply whipped the sword out of his jaw and the old man touched his wounds with a finger moistened with spittle. Within a second there was the boy standing there smiling again and nothing to show for his pains (Mountolive 105).

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Such scenarios punctuate the Quartet, yet are readily acceptable in a universe where past, present, future, time and place, seer and seen, are fused into what Durrell calls "a thick opaque medium welded to space" (112). Here the improbable oddities of Alexandria, represented by the bazaars in the old quarter of the city, give, in Mountolive's view, "the illusion of time spread out flat ... like the skin of an ox; the map of time which one could read from one end to the other, filling it in with known points of reference" (Mountolive 260-261).

The Quartet is filled with dreams, recollections, and images of antiquity which seem no less real in the context of a relativistic universe than the interplay between the characters themselves, and the multi-variate perspectives they bring to the people and events, past and present, unfolding through each of the four volumes. Durrell in fact provides hints from the very beginning that he intends to work from a relativity-inspired vantage point insofar as reality is concerned. Justine opens with the narrator Darley's reminiscence of the Alexandria in which the Quartet unfolds:

> I am thinking back to the time when for the four of us the known world hardly existed; days became simply the spaces between dreams, spaces between the shifting floors of time, of acting, of living out the topical... A tide of meaningless affairs nosing along the dead level of things, entering no climate, leading us nowhere, demanding of us nothing save the impossible – that we should be. Justine would say that we had been trapped in the projection of a will too powerful and too deliberate to be human – the gravitational field which Alexandria threw down about those it had chosen as its exemplars ... (Justine 21-22).

Within the powerful forces exerted by the "gravitational field" of the city, a field that draws, binds, and contains the characters of the quartet, Darley, Justine and their compatriots move through time and space in seemingly random fashion, like atomic

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particles interacting by virtue of their electrical charges. Like these particles Durrell's characters career into, and bounce off of, each other. They are repulsed, rejuvenated and destroyed by each other, and the electrical charges that attract or repulse them comprise the "modern love" of which Durrell claims to make an exploration in his Quartet (A Key To Modern British Poetry 14).

On one level, then, the end result is a macroscopic construct derived from Einstein's relativistic world of quanta, time and space: the four novels represent four dimensions, Alexandria itself represents the subatomic nucleus, or, in terms of general relativity, a gravitational field , the characters are atomic particles, or "matter," and the bond energy of this matter is the bonding (and bond-breaking) power of love between the various players. As Darley comments, "We are the children of our landscape: it dictates behavior and even thought in the measure to which we are responsive to it " (Justine 40).

The reader gains access to the characters' responses to the spatio-temporal landscape of Alexandria by way of the multiple, shifting viewpoints presented throughout the Quartet. It is as though one is riding piggyback on several of the "particles" moving randomly through Durrell's Alexandrian macrocosm, and each particle's (character's) perception of the "reality" of any given event, place, or person determines one's own view of the same. Moreover, with each shift in perspective the reader is forced to reinterpret events, people, and places in much the same way that adding each new piece to a jigsaw puzzle provides an increasingly clarified view of the larger picture for which all the individual pieces are necessary.

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One notable example of this in the Quartet is the characterization of Justine, the beautiful, mysterious and tragically neurotic Jewish woman with a shadowy past. She is married to Nessim, a Coptic Egyptian, who is handsome, gentle, cultured, and fabulously wealthy. Justine's peculiarities and motivations are revealed throughout the four novels by the relationships and recollections of the other characters, especially Darley, Mountolive, Clea, Balthazar, Pursewarden and, of course, Nessim. There is also considerable insight provided by a fictionalized account by Justine's first husband, Arnauti, entitled Moeurs.

In each case the perspective of each character is established as a direct correlative of their closeness to her, the nature of their relationship with her, as well as the times and places in which they encounter her. Furthermore, the personality of each observer comes into play in this perspective, so that each portrait of Justine – though of the same subject – emphasizes differing aspects of her personality in accordance with the various characteristics of the observers. This device parallels Einstein's observation about simultaneity in the context of relativity, which proposes that given the constancy of light's velocity, time and space measurements, which collectively determine an observer's perspective, are relative. That is, they vary with the motion of the observer. Therefore, two events that are simultaneous for observer A are not for observer B, who is moving with a different velocity, and so there is no such thing as the time or the distance between two events. Different observers reach different results, and A is not more correct than B. In the Quartet it is Pursewarden who comes closest to actually stating the tenets of simultaneity when he tells Darley:

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> this very discovery should encourage rather than hamper you. I mean about the mutability of all truth. Each fact can have a thousand motivations, all equally valid, and each fact a thousand faces. So many truths which have little to do with fact! Your duty is to hunt them down. At each moment all multiplicity awaits at your elbow (Clea 64).

Translated into considerations of character, it is Justine who first alludes to this "multiplicity" when, sitting before the mirrors of her dressmaker, she observes:

> Look! Five different pictures of the same subject. Now if I wrote I would try for a multi-dimensional effect in character, a sort of prism-sightedness. Why should not people show more than one side at a time? (Justine 28).

This becomes a central theme of the entire Quartet, not only in terms of characters and their interactions, but also with regard to the overall structuring of the four novels. Pursewarden writes of the "n-dimensional novel," which he defines as follows:

> The narrative momentum forward is countersprung by references backwards in time, giving the impression of a book which is not traveling from a to b but standing above time and turning slowly on its axis to comprehend the whole pattern. Things do not all lead forward to other things: some lead backwards to things which have passed. A marriage of past and present with the flying multiplicity of the future racing towards one ("Workpoints," Justine 198).

As even a casual reading of Proust reveals, the technique of "n-dimensionality" is not new, and can be readily recognized in the technique of "revisiting," where present experiences, and the period of historical time leading to the present, when married to past events mingle in such a way that narrative momentum towards the future is "counter-sprung" by the backward motion towards memory and time past. Durrell's experimentation is revealed in his meshing of "then," "now," and "yet to come," with the result that the two kinds of time – chronological and psychological – become interchangeable, forcing the narrative technique to adapt accordingly. In the Quartet, as Pursewarden says, "at each

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moment of time all multiplicity waits" the observer and the truth-seeker, and to mimic this effect in the narrative Durrell endeavors to provide an environment for both the characters and the reader that allows for transcendence over, distortion of, and deliverance from, time. As John Weigel asserts:

> In the "e-dimensional novel" there are no limits to the number of times the axes of reference may be rotated, so that at any moment and position in space-time an event may be described from any number of reference points. There are an infinite number of "stories" in any "event," all functions of new orientations of the axes from which the locations of the characters are being measured (86).

In some respect a novelist is always committed to dealing with time, whether in the form of chronological or psychological time. As Einstein asserted, the two are distinct and unrelated "realities," and he frequently cautioned against confusing the linearity of time as perceived by the human psyche, with what he intuited to be the "true" nature of time as determined by physical laws independent of, and indifferent to, human psychological interpretation. This is echoed by Darley who, in Balthazar, observes: "Truth is what most contradicts itself in time" (23). Adopting an Einsteinian stance, Pursewarden (and by extension, Durrell himself) advocates perceiving time as an infinite Present in the ever-shifting realm of the space-time continuum. There is no past, present, or future as discrete points on a time line; there is only a "now" that embodies "the impact of all time crowded into one moment of time," as Durrell says (1952: 77). To emphasize this point, Durrell uses constant time shifts and multiple viewpoints throughout the Quartet. For example, Pursewarden's suicide is presented to the reader long before it "actually" occurs in the Quartet, and is furthermore introduced as a memory of the "past" event being recalled in

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the "present"; the tragedy constantly reshapes itself with the points of view of different characters at different times and at different places in the structure of the Quartet. The suicide itself alters with each new re-interpretation.

For Durrell time is not a forward-flowing stream; it moves backwards, forwards, sideways, turns about on multiple axes, and becomes, as Durrell says "a thick opaque medium welded to space" (1952:78), where the order of events is determined by which one first becomes significant to the character from whose point of view Durrell is writing, and also to the individual perception of the reader. If the point of view is altered, so is the order of significance of the events. In this manner the concept of shifting, multiplicitous viewpoints underscore the author's textual assimilation of relativistic time. Therefore the reasons for Pursewarden's suicide vary as a function of both place and time: there are many suicides of the one man because linear time – that is, the sequence of events, each one chronologically discreet and specific, leading up to his death – has been dismantled. The resultant effect is that the suicide is perceived as a single act in space-time with multiple layers and facets, one instant in "the natural order of events which time revises and renews according to its own caprices" (Clea 225).

The psychological time-frame of the recipient of the text, the reader, is another factor in Durrell's attempt to replicate relativistic time in the Quartet because inasmuch as events in the novel are dependent upon the variables of space and time, the novel itself is a function of the interaction between the reader and the text. Each text is, as Weigel points out, "uniquely experienced by each reader, and its order is psychological rather than chronological" (82). Not only does Durrell encourage the reader's active participation in

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the Quartet (for example, through the 'Workpoints' presented at each volume's conclusion), he seeks to reproduce the context that allows for the infinite possibilities of a chronology within the actual text of the Quartet. Consequently, the reader's psychological time and the novels' relativistic space-time seem continuous. In the Quartet, as in the Einsteinian universe, time is the fourth dimension necessary for a complete description of "reality." It is inseparable from the elements of place (or space), character and perspective. In other words, no character, place, event, or viewpoint, whether at rest or in motion, may be defined without the time variable.

Yet another key factor in relativity theory concerns the concept of causality. Durrell says, "Another aspect of the relativity theory is the manner in which it sidetracks causality"(1952: 85). Modern fiction, particularly that of the modernist school, is very much concerned with the issue of causality, particularly in the form of psychological motivation. While most writers typically reflect the idea that knowledge of human psychology is the key to understanding causal laws, Durrell is convinced of precisely the opposite view. The Quartet presupposes for the most part that the more we know about an event, the less we are able to identify the cause and effect. As Darley muses,

> If two or more explanations of a single human action are as good as each other, what does action mean but an illusion – a gesture made against the misty backcloth of a reality made palpable by the delusive nature of human division merely? (Clea 167).

Moreover, in light of shifting time frames and multiple viewpoints, strict causality in the Quartet further loses meaning due to the various interpretations not only of events, but of the 'causes' of these events. Causes are never solidly articulated because Durrell

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interweaves the events and their etiologies in a complex pattern so that the path from a "here" (which is never exactly 'here') to a "there" (the event as perceived by any given character, and pre-processed by the reader) is not a straight-line distance or sequence of steps. In addition: "Each text is uniquely experienced by each reader, and its order is psychological rather than chronological" (82). In this way causality becomes continuous with time and space, thereby losing its contextual significance in the face of multiple plausibilities.

Interestingly enough, Einstein himself remained a staunch determinist for most of his life; his own work forced him to acknowledge the anticausal nature of quantum theory. Despite his personal struggle with the contradictions inherent in the new physics with regard to causal laws, Einstein's relativity theory, particularly the general theory, effected a profound change in the consideration of causality. As Gerald Holton notes:

> modern philosophy is concerned in great part with the nature of space and time, causality and other conceptions to which relativity and quantum physics have contributed (xiii).

Furthermore, J. Robert Oppenheimer says that by altering our ideas about causality and objectivity in the physical world, Einstein's theory reminded us "in a quite unexpected way of the nature and the limitations, as well as the power, of human knowledge itself" (4).

Relativity put to rest once and for all the Kantian view of *a priori* intuitions about absolute time and space which serve as basic organizing principles enabling our minds to construct knowledge from sense perceptions. Kant's organizing principles were considered crucial in understanding how exact laws of nature are possible. Nevertheless, relativity's

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dismantling of the precepts of spatio-temporal absolutism irrevocably disturbed all previous views pertaining to here-ness and there-ness. As Nathan Rotenstreich points out:

> Even if we apply the model of causality, the identification of what is a cause and what is an effect or of what is primary and what is secondary is by no means pre-established. Relativities, understood in the sense that versions of relativity are different from identifiable structures of relatedness, are by no means quite as unequivocal as is somehow "atmospherically" taken for granted (185).

It was Einstein's nature to strive for order, simplicity, and causality in physical laws, as well as in the structure of human nature, and he was suspicious of attempts to use physics for messages of a political, religious, social or philosophical nature. And yet, how could such a profoundly altered view of reality not reverberate in these areas?

Quantum theory added further consternation to Einstein's determinist stance, even though he himself was largely responsible for the evolution of quantum mechanics; however, quantum reality denies the comforts of classical causality. At first Einstein rejected the breakdown of causal laws implied by quantum physics. He wrote to Max Born:

> [Niels] Bohr's opinion about radiation interests me very much. But I should not want to be forced into abandoning strict causality without defending it more strongly than I have so far. I find the idea quite intolerable that an electron exposed to radiation should choose of its own free will, not only its moment to jump off, but also its direction. In that case I would rather be a cobbler, or even an employee in a gaming-house, than a physicist (67).

And in December of 1926 Einstein, annoyed, wrote again to Born, a letter that includes his now famous remark about God not being an odds-maker where natural laws are concerned:

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> The quantum mechanics is very imposing. But an inner voice tells me that it is not yet the real thing. The theory says a lot, but does not really bring us any closer to the secret of the 'old one'. I, at any case, am convinced that He is not playing at dice (69).

After a series of sophisticated debates spanning eight years, Einstein was eventually forced to concede the debate to Bohr, and thereafter turned his energies toward demonstrating, not that quantum theory was wrong, but that it was incomplete. He was deeply preoccupied with the issues of causality and determinism and, strangely, this caused him to make several elementary errors in his theoretical work.

One well documented example is his proposal of the principle of co-variance which, simply stated, requires that the laws of physics be expressible in a language that is the same in all space-time coordinate systems. When Einstein practically applied this principle using the tensor calculus, however, he encountered inconsistencies and contradictions pertaining to the gravitational field equations for space-time. These issues implied that sources of space-time gravity do not necessarily determine the field, a finding at odds with the basic requirement of causality. So he gave up the principle of covariance for two years, essentially because he was unable to accept the anti-causal implications of his own theory.

Like Newton and Darwin before him, Einstein spoke of a type of experience he described as "a deeply religious feeling before a vision of the divinity revealed in the all-embracing unity and rational harmony of the rigorously causal structure of nature." (Isaiah Berlin quoting Einstein, 291). Thus, despite the anti-causal nature of quantum theory and mechanics, Einstein remained a staunch determinist, certain that quantum mechanics was

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only a partial and incomplete vision of ultimate reality. For the remainder of his life, says Bernard Feld,

> two intellectual problems assumed overwhelming importance: the resolution of the contradiction between causal physics and the (to him) incomplete statistical description of nature inherent in the present formulation of quantum mechanics, and the extension of relativity to include electromagnetism (unified field theory) (390n).

If we remember that the premise of Einsteinian relativity is that all spatio-temporal knowledge is relative to an observer's frame of reference and thus subject to revision when the viewpoint is altered, and that there are no privileged frames of reference in the universe, the specific epistemological impact of Einstein's theory involves a number of taxonomic and existential questions which may be resolved only through knowledge of the detailed mathematical equations in which they are symbolically expressed. A sophisticated understanding of the applied mathematics of relativity is beyond the scope of this discussion, and is not really necessary for an understanding of relativity's relationship *vis a vis* modern fiction, and specifically Durrell's Quartet. Suffice to note that in conceptual terms, one implication of the theory is that one cannot be certain that the earth rotates on its axis, or even that it revolves around the sun in the manner to which one has become accustomed.

Philosophically speaking, relativity theory obviously impacts on the concepts of truth and reality, which are themselves co-dependent since if one knows definitively what reality is, one has access to truth. Einstein makes a sharp distinction between "truth" as defined by science --- that is, a set of axioms derived only from empirical fact and observation, and devoid of emotional or subjective interpretations --- and moral or

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psychological "truth," whose determinants include unique personal interpretation and distortion due to individual emotional responses to what is observed. In physics, claims Einstein, truth is far more easily and accurately determined than in everyday life, where the closest we can come to an empirical definition of truth is to say that "truth is what stands the test of experience " (115). Interestingly, as has been mentioned earlier, in the Quartet Darley claims just the opposite: "Truth is what most contradicts itself in time" (Balthazar 23). There are two possible explanations for this. On the one hand, Durrell has possibly misinterpreted relativity theory, confusing scientific axiomatic truth with the far less definable shades of moral, psychological or artistic truth. On the other hand, Darley's statement may be construed as the wrong-headed observation of an artistically immature writer struggling to make sense of the multi-dimensional, and at times chaotic, world of wartime Alexandria and its inhabitants. Again and again throughout the four volumes Darley adds to and revises the "truths" presented to him by the Quartet's many characters; each new piece of information forces him to approach his work-in-progress from a new angle, with a new eye. Ultimately, he realizes that what Einstein says about truth in human life is essentially correct: it stands the test of experience. For example, Pursewarden's suicide is documented, related and analyzed by many observers from many points of view, and all of whom have varying degrees of proximity to Pursewarden himself. In this sense, then, every new detail disturbs the "truth" of the Pursewarden-suicide formulated by Darley just before he receives the latest information. Over time truth is continually contradicted – that is, invented – and so Darley's comment about truth contradicting itself over time is, on the surface, correct. However, at the time he says it he is in the process of

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searching for artistic autonomy and is therefore blind to the much larger Einsteinian truth inherent in the situation; no matter how many observers, evaluators, motives, or details there are regarding Pursewarden's death, the overriding and irrefutable truth remains unchanged: he is dead. But Darley, in his zeal to record absolute truth, is like a man looking up at the tangle of threads on the underside of an Oriental rug, unable to discern the "true" pattern of the rug's surface.

Insofar as reality is concerned, Einstein believed, and relativity showed, how "the concepts of bodily objects, space, subjective and objective time, are connected with one another and with the nature of experience" (96). Einstein saw science as simply a systematized refinement of everyday thinking, and as such he defined reality in terms of various "bodily objects" whose "reality" rests exclusively in the meaning of the sense impressions we attribute to them. "Physics," he wrote, "treats directly only of sense experiences and of the 'understanding' of their connection " (60). Reality, according to Einstein, is an arbitrary creation of the human mind, and the fact that we can order the totality of our sense experiences by means of thinking is miraculous. "The eternal mystery of the world," he wrote,"is its comprehensability " (Out Of My Later Years 61). He further explains:

> In our thinking... we attribute to this concept of the bodily object a significance, which is to a high degree independent of the sense impression which originally gives rise to it. This is what we mean when we attribute to the bodily object "a real existence." The justification of such a setting rests exclusively on the fact that, by means of such concepts and mental relations between them, we are able to orient ourselves in the labyrinth of sense impressions. These notions and relations, although free statements of our thoughts, appear to us as stronger and more unalterable than the individual sense experience itself, the character of which as anything other than the result

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> of an illusion or hallucination is never completely guaranteed. On the other hand, these concepts and relations, and indeed the setting of real objects and, generally speaking, "the real world," have justification only in so far as they are connected with sense impressions between which they form a mental connection (61).

In the world of physical laws prior to the advent of relativity, however, the illusion is found in the idea that objective time and the meaning of simultaneity (for events distant in space) are distinct and independent of each other. Through general relativity Einstein proved that they are not. As a result, in our everyday perceptions of reality we fail to differentiate between events or objects that are simultaneously seen and those that are simultaneously happening, thus blurring the line between time as defined by physics – that is, continuous with space and mass-energy – and local time as universally perceived by human psychological machinery. Essentially, both time and motion have no absolute base-line values and are not quantifiable to the extent, and in the manner, we are accustomed to doing. Even the concept of mass – that is, tangible manifestations of material reality – is not what it "really" appears to be; in fact it is not "real" at all, but rather, a form of pure energy. Quantum theory takes this argument a step further and proposes that since subatomic energy transactions may only be determined statistically, the energy of which mass is comprised is itself indefinable to a great extent because it is unpredictable in an absolute sense.

Einstein's definition of reality remained fairly consistent with the premise underlying his relativity theory, even though he made certain distinctions between empirical objective reality – which exists independent of human thought – and the subjective convolutions inherent in psychological notions of "reality":

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> Einstein was a genuine sage, his world an epic theatre. There was no inevitability about the order of nature: ever again an unexpected and unpredicted new reality could emerge. That it was unexpected did not speak against it. If "good" theory brought the new theory, it constituted reality; the new picture was not accompanied by an inner conviction that the world had to be such and no other just because it turned out to be such.
>
> ***
>
> His chosen moral code was all-embracing. It was reality in the same sense as his own unifying theory of the world – once formulated, it becomes reality (208-209).

Furthermore, Einstein allied himself with the spirit of Spinozan logic and pantheism that based its faith on the cognitive assumption that while reality may not always be readily accessible to the limited capabilities of man, there is nevertheless a rationally comprehensible cosmos where God as a personal entity concerned with the fates and actions of human beings does not exist. Rather, to Einstein God is a "rational, logical, concept, sometimes even metaphoric, as necessitated by the basic notion that the world is constructed according to the 'orderly harmony of what exists'." (Tal 309). God, then, is symbolically expressive of the pluralistic unity and harmony in the cosmos. Institutional religious dogma and ritualism as determinants of reality left him indifferent; he preferred what he called "cosmic religious feeling" (Ideas and Opinions 37) which he believed to be meaningful religiosity for the rational world of scientific thought. This spiritually tinged concept of reality

> takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is utterly insignificant (Ideas and Opinions 40).

In addition,

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> The individual feels the futility of human desires and aims and the sublimity and marvelous order which reveal themselves both in nature and in the world of thought. Individual existence impresses him as a sort of prison and he wants to experience the universe as a single significant whole (43).

Reality, then, is a construction of logical simplicity, order, and harmony which "we can grasp humbly and only imperfectly. I believe that we have to content ourselves with our imperfect knowledge and understanding and treat values and moral obligations as a purely human problem – the most important of all human problems ..." (Hoffman and Dukas 95). He was convinced that the epistemological validity of causation and determinism do not necessarily lead to the relativization of man's ethical values (Tal 309).

In The Alexandria Quartet, Durrell mirrors Einstein's philosophy primarily through Pursewarden, the character who most consistently upholds the tenets of relativity. For example, in Justine he warns:

> it is God with which we must be careful; for He makes such a powerful appeal to what is lowest in human nature – our feelings of insufficiency, fear of the unknown, personal failings; above all the monstrous egotism which sees in the martyr's crown an athletic prize which is really hard to attain. God's real and subtle nature must be clear of distinctions; a glass of spring-water, tasteless, odourless, merely refreshing: and surely its appeal would be to the few, the very few, real contemplatives? (117).

Echoing Einstein's comments regarding man's imperfect comprehension of reality and the ultimate laws of nature, Durrell, speaking again through Pursewarden, considers the corollary problem of reconciliation between what is, what is perceived to be, and how man should respond to this dichotomous phenomenon. Self-consciously, Pursewarden muses:

> Are real human beings becoming simply extended humours capable of use, and does this cut one off from them a bit? Yes. For observation throws down

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> a field about the observed person or object. Yes. Makes the unconditional response more difficult --the response to the common ties, affections, love and so on. But this is not only the writer's problem – it is everyone's problem (Mountolive 142).

As a direct result of Einstein's relativity theory, Durrell attempts transcontextually to graft the theory and its primary philosophical ideas onto The Alexandria Quartet. Multiple viewpoints and rotating axes of reference are employed to replicate the process of deciding reality and redefining "truth" in a universe without fixed points of reference. At the beginning of the Quartet Darley decides that "only in the silences of the painter or the writer can reality be reordered, reworked and made to show its significant side" (Justine 17). He isolates himself on an island in the Cyclades, where "surrounded by history on all sides, this empty island alone is free from every reference" (Justine 113). There he experiences the freedom and the silence to reconstruct the reality of Alexandria and its habituees, attempting to "frame them in the heavy steel webs of metaphors which will last half as long as the city itself" (Justine 114). Gradually he comes to recognize the many-sidedness of the redefined concept of personality and the distortions of relativistic reality, until he is able to say: "I realize that each person can claim only one aspect of our character as part of his knowledge. To everyone we turn a different face of the prism" (Justine 118-119).

Related aspects of Einsteinian relativity are exploited elsewhere in the Quartet. Balthazar, the third volume, is prefaced by a "Note" which specifies the pattern of the Quartet as a whole. It is presented as the "soup mix recipe of a continuum" comprising three spatial variables (Durrell calls them "sides") and one temporal variable. In addition,

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all four volumes are rotated on various axes representative of both "subjective and objective modes"(Balthazar, Note), An example of this is David Mountolive, the subject of Mountolive. In the other three novels, however, he is an object, and times a very peripheral figure. Similarly, Darley, who is the subject in Justine, Balthazar, and Clea, becomes the object in Mountolive, where his role of narrator is usurped by David Mountolive. The combination of the six structural variables – three of space, one of time, and two of perspective – are manipulated to effect the word continuum: "a morphological form one might appropriately call 'classical' ... for our time" (Balthazar, Note). Pursewarden, particularly, rebels against what he perceives to be "the absurd dictates of narrative form in prose" (Balthazar 117) and advocates increased reader participation, the outcome of which is the dominance of the subjective mode in such a way that the reader creates the novel as much, if not more, than the author does. John Weigel notes that

> Pursewarden's claim that the reader should rely more upon his own resources moves in the direction of the inkblot, the understructured stimulus pattern. It asks from the reader maximum projection (Lawrence Durrell 87).

Obviously this concept is related to the development of deconstructionist theory, although that is clearly not Durrell's guiding principle. Nevertheless, it is tempting to draw a parallel between deconstructionism and relativity theory as applied to literature.

Juxtaposed against Pursewarden's concept of the "n-dimensional novel trilogy" (Justine 248) and "the idea of a series of novels with 'sliding panels'," is Balthazar's 'Interlinear', which he defines as analogous with "some mediaeval palimpsest where different sorts of truth are thrown down one upon the other, the one obliterating or perhaps supplementing another " (Balthazar 183). Even the statistical, indeterminate

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behavior of quanta are appropriated by Durrell and become an important metaphor in the Quartet. Quantum theory proposes that the sub-atomic particles in matter fall randomly and may be recorded only in reference to a probability rating. Pursewarden claims that his writing is a manifestation of the "poetic continuum ... it is intended to give a stereoscopic effect to character. And events aren't in serial form, but collect here and there like quanta, like real life" (Balthazar 245). Events, therefore, are statistical concepts and the author merely records them. In Mountolive Durrell as no-person narrator refers to "gravitational forces which lie inherent in the time-spring of our acts, making them spread, ramify, and distort themselves" (Mountolive 214). In point of fact it is the quasi-determinist, probabilistic context in which all of the Quartet's characters exist that defines their existence.

A final quality of the Quartet borrowed from relativity is that as a work of fiction it is not a "closed system"; that is, there are apparently endless options open to the reader not only as regards the interpretation of the text, but also in its continuation beyond the "boundaries" set by Durrell in the four volumes. To actualize this idea Durrell provides 'Workpoints' at the end of each novel so that the reader may then take over and radiate the story out from numerous referential "axes" going in various directions. Using the original variables of space-time, it is possible to go from new reference points in old directions or from old reference points in new directions ("The Alexandria Quartet As Experiment" 39). Given that space in a relativistic universe is curved, "endings" are not possible; therefore, the Quartet has no endings, a fact that is especially emphasized in the final volume, Clea, where Darley says:

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> Yes, one day I found myself writing down with trembling fingers the four words (four letters! four faces!) with which every storyteller since the world began has staked his slender claim to the attention of his fellow-men. Words which presage simply the old story of an artist coming of age. I wrote: "Once upon a time ..." (Clea 275).

The use of relativity theory in the Quartet reflects the interpretive differences between mathematical expressions of Einstein's theory and the lay representation that results from making a transcontextual shift into a literary form. In the Quartet relativity is projected metaphorically and philosophically rather than proven on the basis of strictly mathematical dictates. More than anything, Durrell exploits the emotive aspects of the theory. In the end, however, this makes little difference in the attempt to define reality, since purely mathematical interpretations are in their own way insufficient for the task:

> It goes without saying that one who equates physical reasoning with mathematical reasoning, for example, might tend toward complete relativism when considering the earth's movement with respect to distant galaxies, because mathematically it makes no difference whether the earth is moving, or the stars fixed, or even both. Again, a mathematical realist who hypostasizes the notion of absolute space or who sees a space-time construct as the ultimate reality may tend to make extravagant ontological claims on the basis of his theorizing (Causality In Contemporary Science 294).

Significantly, Darley encounters the literary side of this issue and in frustration asks, "How then am I to manipulate this mass of crystallized data in order to work out the meaning of it ...?" (Balthazar 183). Not having access to the "other" language of relativity, mathematics, and confounded by the inadequacy of his own language he cries: "I wish I knew. I wish I knew!" (Balthazar 184).

In an essay entitled "Moral Decay" Einstein wrote:

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> All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree. All these aspirations are directed ennobling man's life, lifting it from mere physical existence and leading the individual toward freedom (1).

This is the principle that in a general sense inspired the development of relativity and his later work on the unified field theory, and it is the principle we see at work in The Alexandria Quartet, where Durrell attempts to find the meeting point at the base of the art-science branches. Both have the same roots and are nourished by many of the same goals. Durrell seemed aware of this long before he wrote the Quartet; in 1938, he had partially completed an experimental work based on yet another field of science, Euclidean geometry. On August 23rd he wrote to Henry Miller:

> "The Aquarians" has been left for a month or so. It is all there but I feel powerless to continue ... I have cast it into a strange and novel form, that of a Euclidean proposition: first a letter from God to me explaining and enunciating the theorem; then an analysis of the theorem; then a letter from me to God explaining who I am and what I have tried to do ... I have lost revolution and anarchy now and am swimming through hundreds of compass points towards myself. It is difficult and terrifying (Lawrence Durrell, Henry Miller: A Private Correspondence 130).

Traditionally literature has reflected a search for unification on a psychological plane rather than through natural law. However, in Einstein's cosmological view natural law prevails, and it is precisely this shift in emphasis Durrell seeks to impose when he attempts to graft the elements of theoretical relativity onto the Quartet. As a result of working in an experimentalist mode, the construction of the tetralogy is not only Durrell's achievement of integration between elements of fiction and relativity, it is a hybrid form of literature comprising elements of both modernism and postmodernism, with much heavier emphasis on the latter. It is the relativity in the Quartet that lends it an experimental flavor and defines its postmodernist aspects. Like Pursewarden, Durrell developed the Quartet out of a conviction that fiction needs to escape the stranglehold of its traditional forms

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and find a new structure through which it can express the new world view, and in Durrell's case this is the world according to Einstein.

If nothing else, the Quartet provides evidence for the idea that innovative art may descend directly from innovative science. Furthermore,

> Einstein's theory is perhaps the clearest instance of our assertion that even a scientific theory may possess a personal element. Einstein's theory is so original that it is very difficult, even after the fact, to provide it with an ancestry. It is not in the least a natural culmination of the ideas that precede it. It was a bolt from the blue. The extraordinary lack of comprehension with which the scientific world greeted it was due not to its technical difficulties, but to the unfamiliarity of the outlook it assumed. It seemed to be the product of an alien mind.
>
> ***
>
> Science provides few instances of theories as original as this – indeed, perhaps there is no other scientific theory so intensely original as Einstein's theory (268-269).

This inspired originality of thought is precisely what appealed to the lay public, and the artists and philosophers, political theorists and psychologists, sociologists and even cultural anthropologists, after relativity was popularized. Durrell obviously had some interest in, and knowledge of, the principles involved prior to constructing the Quartet, but the extent to which even he understood the theory is not always discernible within the four volumes which at times seem only vaguely attributable to relativity theory. In some instances the density of the prose obscures the presence of relativistic cross-references. However, one thing can be said with certainty: Durrell's transcontextual use of relativity theory in the Quartet pushes it into the realm of postmodernist literature, producing a transitional literary form that may be called "quantum fiction" because of its etiology in physical science.

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CHAPTER III Relativity and Quantum Fiction in the Postmodern Landscape

Durrell's use of relativity throughout the Quartet resulted in a work of literature that is more postmodernist than modernist, even though there are certainly many elements of literary modernism in the four volumes, particularly Mountolive. In this sense Durrell may be perceived as a "bridge writer"; that is, an author whose work bridges two distinct literary time frames; in Durrell's case, modernism and postmodernism. There are also many echoes of other influences: naturalism, impressionism, psychoanalytic stream of consciousness and existentialism. The postmodernist universe is much like the relativistic universe in the Einsteinian sense, where the concepts of multi-dimensionality, randomness, and the redefinition of time and space, of reality itself, are of paramount importance. In postmodernist fiction, as in the Einsteinian ethos, there is an effort to reproduce the rhythms and discontinuities of the experiential world using disjunction and simultaneity, two characteristics found in the world of theoretical physics. Raymond Federman observes:

> fiction can no longer be reality, or a representation of reality, or an imitation or even a recreation of reality; it can only be A REALITY --an autonomous reality whose only relation with the real world is to improve that world. To create fiction is, in fact, a way to abolish reality, and especially to abolish the notion that reality is truth (140).

Hassan adds:

> Already, our senses are becoming co-extensive with the cosmos: we can "touch" things on the moon and "hear" quasars at the end of the universe. Slowly, we are all entering a multidimensional, non-Euclidean, and still sensuous – for sense and mind are one – realm of existence (137).

Postmodernist fiction is in many ways about finding and experiencing new levels of existence. It emphasizes the democratization of response on the part of the reader, and fosters openness to many levels of experience. Furthermore, postmodernism seeks to involve the reader in determining a

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"meaning" beyond the words on the page, often by the juxtaposition of unrelated images and ideas. As a result, the reader-text dividing line is frequently crossed or its boundaries extended. This can only occur, postmodernist writers seem to be saying, in a universe where time and space, reader and text, observer and observed, are free to move unhindered by the traditional restraints of linear time, two-dimensional space, and chronologically dependent narratives. In these respects post-modernist fiction imitates in literary form the chief dictates of an Einsteinian universe where

> In short, physics has discovered
> That there are no solids
> No continuous surfaces,
> No straight lines;
> Only waves,
> No things,
> Only energy event complexes,
> Only behaviors,
> Only webs,
> Only relationships ...
> (Buckminster Fuller, Intuition)

Durrell's commitment to relativity-based literature in The Alexandria Quartet is also a commitment to the postmodernist aesthetic in the sense that both Einsteinian relativity and postmodernist ideology share a common conceptual vocabulary. In The Postmodern Scene, for example, Kroker and Cook discuss the influence of relativity and quantum theory on the evolution of postmodernism:

> Quantum physics gives us a world which is a matter of probability, paradox and irony; where singular events (with their representational logic) dissolve into relations across unbounded energy fields; and in which the dualisms of classical physics are rejected in favor of structure ... and morphological relations of identity and similitude (248).

In fin de millénaire society, science is the language of power, the primary creator of postmodernism's disintegrative vision. Kroker and Cook define the result of the quantum shift heralded by relativistic

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science as "a purely relational world view" (247) which they characterize as "hyper-Derridean" (247). The postmodernist world is regulated by "aesthetic symmetry" (248) and

> random and unpredictable quarks from one energy level to another are its principle of action; purely contiguous relations of a spatial order are its horizon; structural relationships of similitude and difference are its basic geometry; an infinite regress of all matter, from the hyper-density of black holes to the purely disintegrative world of sub-molecular particles ... in the *creatio ex nihilo* of unified field theory is its central canon (248).

This is also the world of Durrell's Quartet, where aesthetic symmetry is provided by the creation of a four-volume structure representative of relativistic four-dimensionality (in fact, the number four is a recurring factor throughout the Quartet: Darley's quadrangular relationship with Nessim, Justine and Melissa; Pursewarden's four-decker novel concept, Justine's constantly turning up the Four of Cups card in her Tarot deck). "Random and unpredictable quarks from one energy level to another" are articulated in the Quartet by the constantly shifting interactions between characters, which in turn provides the "principle of action" mentioned by Cook and Kroker. They also answer the requirement for "structural relationships of similitude and difference." An "infinite regress of all matter" describes the infinitely expandable novels of the Quartet, whose 'Workpoints' sections make the point that not only can the "stories" be extrapolated indefinitely, but they can be expanded not out of general concepts, but from very particular details (the "sub-molecular particles" of Kroker and Cook's description.) The lushness of Durrell's prose and his complex, heavily layered network of images, as well as the presentation of multiple perspectives (some of which come from stories within books within the Quartet; for example, Arnauti's perspective on Justine fictionalized in Moeurs, presented from Darley's perspective after he reads Moeurs, which is in turn presented as

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part of the narrative of Justine, the tetralogy's first volume) exemplify the postmodernist tendency toward the "hyper-density of black holes."

The threat posed by disruptive aspects of modern science, especially theoretical physics, is mirrored in postmodern fiction through consistent portrayals of a world in upheaval, both socially and on an individual level, of experiential discontinuity, unpredictability, and an acute awareness of the absurd. There is an exaggerated concern with the mundanities of everyday life, often yoked to images of fantasy and/or surrealistic improbability. Relativity and quantum physics have, in the words of Gerald Graff, "assaulted our sense of assurance about reality" (8). He further observes that

> It is no longer a simple matter, if it ever was, to distinguish between the real and the fictive. It would be difficult to exaggerate the extent to which modern reality seems to render absurd all attempts to understand, define, explain, and formulate it ... The very notions of understanding, definition, explanation, and "point of view" have come to seem suspect (8).

Indeed, in Justine, the first of the four volumes of the Quartet, the character of Nessim, Justine's husband, begins to disintegrate under the vast pressures of his life, which become increasingly incomprehensible to him. Justine's casual and repeated infidelities, coupled with his continued failure to penetrate the mysteries of her tormented, restless personality, eventually drive him into a period of near-madness and delusions. Slipping in and out of reality/unreality, Nessim cries, "What could one believe when reality mocked the imagination by its performance?" (Justine 147). The question, a distinctly postmodernist query, surfaces frequently in various incarnations throughout the Quartet. Moreover, Graff concludes that

> It sometimes seems as if the only way we can keep up – or get even – with an increasingly unreal reality is by abandoning the concept of reality itself and seeing to it that everything is labelled unreal ... Alienation is thus combatted by the completion of alienation (9).

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Nessim escapes the intolerable "unreal reality" by gradually descending into the alienation of his own inner world:

> they were not all the dreams of the night hours. They overlapped reality and interrupted his waking mind as if the membranes of his consciousness had been suddenly torn in places to admit them (Justine 143).

This sounds rather like a description of a Magritte painting. Durrell goes on to add:

> that great cycle of historical dreams which now replaced the dreams of his childhood in his mind, and into which the City now threw itself – as if at last it had found a responsive subject through which to express the collective desires, the collective wishes, which informed its culture (Justine 143).

The City is an important metaphor in postmodern fiction, the compelling urban landscape where the chaotic, irrational, unreal realities of life are played out. It embodies the unpredictable world of the absurd, and of fantasy, as well as the harsh mundane reality underlying the fantastical elements. By this definition the City, that is, Durrell's Alexandria, is rendered in postmodernist fashion as the New Oz, a place where things are seldom as they appear to be, and yet for all their chaos are unified by the magnetic field emitted by the City itself. This is strikingly articulated by Pursewarden, who writes:

> We were still almost a couple of hours' steaming distance before land could possibly come into sight when suddenly my companion shouted and pointed at the horizon. We saw inverted in the sky a full-scale mirage of the city, luminous and trembling, as if painted on dusty silk: yet in the nicest detail ... The whole representation was as breathtaking as a masterpiece painted in fresh dew. It hung there in the sky for a considerable time... before melting slowly into the horizon mist. An hour later the real city appeared, swelling from a smudge to the size of its mirage (Balthazar 3).

Alexandria is Durrell's microcosmic symbol of the Einsteinian universe.

Consequently, even while retreating from sanity and reality Nessim "would wake to see the towers and minarets printed on the exhausted, dust-powdered sky and see on them as if *en montage*

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the giant footprints of the historical memory which lies behind the recollections of individual personality, its mentor and guide: indeed its inventor, since man is only an extension of the spirit of place" (Justine 143).

The city invades, and becomes continuous with, the inner realities of many of the characters' psyches. Its history becomes their history, and past and present fold into each other and influence their thoughts and actions. The psychological landscapes of the various *personnae* form a continuum with the external landscapes of objective reality contained by everyday life in Alexandria. Clea, the wise and beautiful painter for whom the final volume of the Quartet is named, reminds Darley: "We are the children of our landscape; it dictates behavior and even thought in the measure to which we are responsive to it. I can think of no better identification " (Justine 40). And so it is that in Nessim's delusions

> while the gallery of historical dreams held the foreground of his mind the figures of his friends and acquaintances, palpable and real, walked backwards and forwards among them, inhabiting an amazing historical space-time as living personages (Justine 147).

Every character is allied with Alexandria, both spatially and temporally, and has a unique and sometimes profound perspective on its importance, both for their own lives and the lives of the characters with which they interact. For Darley, the struggling would-be writer, "the city had two centers of gravity – the true and magnetic north of its personality: and between them the temperament of its inhabitants sparked harshly like a leaky electric discharge" (Justine 104). He believes in retrospect that "the [city] symbolized for me the great conquests of man in the realm of matter, space and time ..." (Justine 108). And yet, because Alexandria is continuous with the internal and external spaces of its inhabitants, as they move through time Darley finds himself unable to write

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completely or objectively about the city, even when he leaves it, thinking that distance will engender an objective perspective:

> The city, half imagined (yet wholly real) begins and ends in us, roots lodged in our memory.
>
> ***
>
> Have I not said enough about Alexandria? Am I to be reinfected once more by the dream of it and the memory of its inhabitants? Dreams I had thought safely locked up on paper, confined to the strong-rooms of memory! (Balthazar 1).

Alexandria represents the essential fabric of space-time in the Quartet arc, like both space and time. absorbs the colorations of its characters' histories, personalities, actions and points of view. Gradually, as the Quartet unfolds (and refolds upon itself!) it becomes not just the city as City, but also the city as character. This leads Darley to wonder, "How will I deliver myself from this whore among cities ... ?" (Balthazar 9) which he perceives to be "... the only city left where every extreme of race and habit can meet and marry, where inner destinies can intersect." (Balthazar 8). The answer is provided in a poem by the Alexandrian C. P. Cavafy included in the 'Workpoints' section of Justine:

> There's no new land, my friend, no New sea; for the city will follow you In the same streets you'll wander endlessly, The same mental suburbs slip from youth to age, In the same house go white at last -- The city is a cage.
>
> "The City"
>
> (Justine 201)

Every major character in the Quartet is sensitized to the importance of Alexandria, and in fact Durrell himself, in true postmodernist fashion, refers to the-four volumes as "a Big City Poem" (49). Carl Bode, in a detailed discussion of Durrell's Alexandria, says, "He writes about Alexandria like a lover" (214) and that it is much more than just a setting; that is the most striking thing about it. It is the main character itself" (214). The characters in the Quartet relate to the city, and are as profoundly affected by it, as though it were a person. Pursewarden writes: "Justine and her city are

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alike in that they both have a strong flavor without having any real character" (Justine 116) while Darley says of her: "Broken from the divine harmony of herself she fell ... and became the tragic manifestation of matter; and the whole universe of the city ... was formed out of her agony and remorse" (Justine 39). Upon reading Justine's diary, where she has painstakingly recreated the details of her dual relationships with Nessim, her husband, and Darley, he in turn writes that these entries "almost exactly express the curiously ingrown quality of a love which I had come to recognize as peculiar to the city rather than to ourselves " (Justine 46).

Alexandria is not only representative of space and place, but also of time. In the final volume of the tetralogy Darley returns to the city after a hiatus and perceives that

> all at once it seemed that past and present had joined again without any divisions in it, and that all my memories and impressions had ordered themselves into one complete pattern whose metaphor was always the shining city of the disinherited (Clea 81)

And later:

> So the city claimed me once more --the same city made now somehow less poignant and less terrifying than it had been in the past by new displacements in time (Clea 93).

And if, as Clea herself claims, the participants in the Quartet are "the children of [their] landscape" (Justine 40), then Darley is a prodigal son returning to the landscape of Alexandria, "captured once more by the gravitational field of the city" (Clea 89). Time folds upon itself for him in the sense that when he comes back to Alexandria, and to Clea, he has "time to experience both a sense of familiarity and one of alienation, measuring stability against change, past against present tense" (Clea 93).

For Clea the city is a piece of art constantly creating and recreating itself; it is a living painting in which she and the other characters provide an infinite supply of ever-shifting scenarios through the enactment of their lives. When Darley returns to Alexandria after a long time away from the city

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she gives him a tour, filling in passing scenes and places with pieces of the history that has been created in his absence: stories, imitations of since-dead characters, amusing anecdotes, gossip, and insightful commentaries as to the motivations behind the movements of the other characters. She concludes by telling him: "You see, Darley, I sort of wanted to recompose the city for you so that you could walk back into the painting from another angle and feel quite at home" (Clea 80).

In essence Alexandria is not only a concrete physical entity, for the characters it is a state of mind, and an event in non-linear time. Fusing these three definitions, it becomes part of Durrell's literary space-time "word continuum". Through Pursewarden the author alludes to this concept in the following manner:

> If you think of yourself as a sleeping city for example ... what? You can sit quiet and hear the process going on, going about their business; volition, desire, will, cognition, passion, co-nation. I mean like the million legs of a centipede carrying on with the body powerless to do anything about it. One gets exhausted trying to circumnavigate these huge fields of experience; we are never free, we writers (Justine 116).

Other elements frequently characterized as distinctly postmodern pervade the Quartet. These are worth detailed discussion in light of the fact that their manifestation in the four volumes can be directly allied with Durrell's use of Einsteinian relativity.

If we return to the question of multiple realities, a variation on the literary quest for truth, it becomes apparent that postmodernism departs from the idea that there are certain identifiable elements and observable phenomena which constitute, more or less, a uniform, universal experience called reality. It is not that the postmodernists claim there is no such thing as reality; rather, that objective reality is very much dependent on who is observing it, how they perceive what they experience (which in turn is based upon their unique psychological composition), where and when they experience it, and to what degree they are receptive to the experience. Inasmuch as

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postmodernism is like a drawstring pulling together the philosophical fabric of both Romanticism and Modernism, the particular notion did not originate with the advent of postmodern literary theory, but derived from the other two periods. It was Kant who exercised a great influence on the nineteenth century writers by concluding that in the absence of any appeal to a coercive reality to which the multiplicity of subjective viewpoints can be ascribed, all perspectives become equally valid (Protegomena 46) Furthermore, Henry David Aiken points out that a further blow was struck to the nineteenth century concept of external reality as the manifestation of imaginative, that is, internal autonomy when it became clear that imagination-generated truth and order are arbitrary and subjective constructs. This introduced ambiguity into the definition of meaning in modern aesthetic theory. Aiken notes that nineteenth-century philosophers began to "recognize that objectivity is not so much a fact about the universe as it as a matter of common standards of judgement and criticism" (23).

Seizing this idea, the postmodernists took it to its logical, or rather, illogical limit, so that theorists such as Erich Heller describe "the loss of significant external reality" (172) and Alain Robbe-Grillet concludes that "the world is neither significant or absurd. It quite simply is" (87). By this definition there are no objective guideline for processing experience; the meaning of experiences, and, by extension, of reality, is in the observer and not in the experiences themselves. Ultimately, as Gerald Graff points out, in postmodern fiction "alienation from significant external reality, from all reality, becomes an inescapable condition " (55).

In the Quartet this issue is articulated over and over again by various characters, but especially eloquently by Pursewarden, who links the question of reality's nature and existence to Einsteinian relativity:

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> Our view of reality is conditioned by our position in space-time –not by our personalities as we like to think. Thus every interpretation of reality is based upon a unique position. Two paces East or West and the whole picture is changed (Balthazar 2)

To Darley, "all ideas seem equally good at the beginning of the story" (Justine 41) and later ponders:

> If two or more explanations of a single human action are as good as each other then what does action mean but an illusion – a gesture made against the misty backcloth of a reality made palpable by the delusive nature of human division merely? (Clea 167).

This echoes Einstein's discovery through the development of the theory of special relativity. Since physics concerns itself with the relations between perceived objects and phenomena, he found that if absolute motion is imperceptible, absolute position in space is a fairy tale, and absolute space cannot withstand the surrender of absolute position. The next logical conclusion is that absolute reality simply does not exist, and not only does it not exist in the speculative constructs of the imagination, it does not exist within the realm of the physical world. Einstein's world of spatial contractions and time dilations is both abstract and bizarre; it negates conventional interpretation of reality based on objectivity and determinism. Human perceptual machinery, cognitive and otherwise, simply does not apply in a quantum world. In point of fact, Einstein himself initially resisted the concept he had been largely responsible for developing, but his own research forced him to confront the dilemma that had been catalyzed by relativity – a quantum world based on observer-created reality. Regarding this phenomenon, the physicist Heinz Pagels says

> the quantum theory requires that what the observer decides to measure influences the measurement. What is actually going on in the quantum world depends on how we decide to observe it. The world just isn't "there" independent of our observing it; what is there depends in part on what we choose to see – reality is partially created by the observer (48).

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It is this very definition of reality, pervasive in postmodern literature, which proffers the idea that truth is a function of our mental paradigms rather than the alignment of these paradigms with an objective reality. Understanding this principle facilitates distinction between the relativity principle that makes quantum theory possible, and the fallacious phrase "everything's relative," often used to explain Einstein's concept. It is not that everything is relative, but that nothing is. This is the peculiar philosophical premise at the heart of both relativity and, by extension, quantum theory. The price of assimilating this redefined reality is what Robert March describes as "a lot of outrage to our common sense" (126). Nevertheless, awareness of quantum reality in a relativistic universe is one of the essential ingredients of postmodernism, creating a point of departure from modernism in that, according to Ronald Sukenick:

> Realistic fiction presupposed chronological time as the medium of a plotted narrative, an irreducible individual psyche as the subject of its characterization, and, above all, the ultimate, concrete reality of things as the object and rationale of its description. In the world of postrealism, however, all of these absolutes become absolutely problematic (41).

Again, the observation reflects the randomness, indeterminacy, and anti-absolutism found in relativity and quantum physics. These same governing factors are found in Durrell's Quartet, where although the characters live quantum lives in the relativistic space-time of Alexandria, they simultaneously protest against, or express uneasiness with, the very environment in which they exist. Clea comments: "If you are born of the artist tribe it is a waste of time to try to function as a priest. You have to be faithful to your angle of vision, and at the same time fully recognize its partiality" (Clea 110). Pursewarden, who represents one of Durrell's "voices" in the tetralogy, alludes to the difficulty and disorienting nature of a quantum world view when he writes:

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> ... all these attempts to circumscribe God in words and phrases ... No one thing can explain everything: though everything can illuminate something ... If God were anything He would be an art. Sculpture or medicine. But the immense extension of knowledge in our age, the growth of new sciences, makes it almost impossible to digest the available flavors and put them to use (Justine 117).

Ultimately, Pursewarden decides to assimilate the "new sciences" in his artistic life, which results in his creating the theory of an "n-dimensional novel trilogy" (Justine 198) and evolving a concept, "the heraldic reality", of poetic life which will lead the searching artist to the discovery that "truth has its own built in morality" (Clea 145). Moreover, he advises: "The heraldic reality can strike from any point above or below: it is not particular" (Clea 145). We are not surprised, then, to read that Pursewarden's most famous literary work is a trilogy entitled God Is A Humorist, vaguely reminiscent of Einstein's remark that "the Lord is subtle, but He is not malicious" (77). Pursewarden's observations echo those of postmodernist literary theorists like Philip Stevick, who notes that unlike modernist writers, postmodernists have had to face the issues raised by quantum reality and relativity squarely, and as a result

> successful narrative art, confronting chaos, has had to find its own point of view toward both the nature of that chaos and the fact of confronting it, a shared point of view characteristic of our time ... (146).

Interestingly, in the Quartet it is Balthazar, a psychiatrist and therefore a scientist, who maintains that the relativistic universe cannot only be comprehended perceptually, but is in fact on some level synchronous with the subconscious mind. He articulates the concept of observer-determined reality, a key aspect of Einstein's theory; he extols the efficacy of

> the fons signatus of the psyche and its ability to perceive an inherent order in the universe which underlies the apparently formless and arbitrariness of phenomena. Disciplines of mind could enable people to penetrate behind the veil of reality and to discover harmonies in space and time which correspond to the inner structures of our own psyches.

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***

> We are enlisting everything in order to make man's wholeness match the wholeness of the universe... (Justine 85).

Darley later echoes the same conviction when he observes: "Somewhere in the heart of experience there is an order and coherence which we might surprise if we were attentive enough, loving enough, or patient enough" (Justine 178).This is a distinctly postmodernist view in that it denotes a certain optimism about the relativistic universe that is lacking in modernist fiction, where the immediacy and strangeness of the Einsteinian theory is presented as more of a threat than an intriguing new way to conceptualize space, time, and the cosmos. W.H. Auden describes this reaction as follows:

> Science has destroyed our faith in the naive observations of our senses: we cannot, it tells us, ever know what the physical universe is really like; we can only hold whatever subjective notion is appropriate to the particular human purpose we have in view.
>
> This destroys the traditional conception of art as mimesis, for there is no longer a nature "out there" to be truly or falsely imitated; all an artist can be true to are his subjective sensations and feelings (78-79).

This was very much the case long before Einstein's relativity or the unraveling of the disturbing microcosmic world of quantum mechanics. But Einstein did alter irrevocably how the universe must be perceived by presenting an incongruent, spatial-temporal reality whose laws not only exist contrary to what has until recently been universally accepted, but in actuality are well beyond the limits of what human perceptual capability can grasp. Postmodernist fiction departs from the reactionary pessimism of the modernists and opts instead for adaptation and incorporation of the Einsteinian ethos. Its continuity with the Romantics and Modernists derives from its attempt to pull the past into the future, and a resignation to the fact that the universe and its laws are now changed, not just by virtue of expanded knowledge, but by being radically different from the very foundations

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upon which that knowledge was constructed. However, it is with an optimistic, future-oriented, even humorous stance that postmodernism approaches the quantum world and the relativistic universe. There is a spirit of experimentalism running through this type of fiction, and a willingness to confront and explore the newly discovered lack of boundaries indicated by Einsteinian reality. John Barth comments on this assimilation:

> ... we may regard ourselves as being not necessarily cut off from the nineteenth century and its predecessors by the accomplishments of our artistic parents and grandparents in the twentieth century, but rather as free to come to new terms with both realism and antirealism, linearity and non-linearity, continuity and discontinuity. If the term "postmodern" describes anything worthwhile, it describes this freedom, successfully exercised (128-129).

As a result there is a randomizing of elements within postmodernist fiction that reflects the randomized world of quantum physics, as well as a conscious disavowal of the "rules" governing the world of "reality," which celebrates the ideology of relativistic physics. Thus literature becomes almost physical in its presence, giving way to what Gerald Graff calls "a celebration of energy – the vitalism of a world that cannot be understood or controlled" (58). In such a world, he further points out, "a world which simply is, pointlessness is truth" (57), Durrell's Pursewarden comes to much the same conclusion in a written address to Darley, who he sees as still hopelessly mired in the traditional construction of pre-Einsteinian reality:

> Awake, moon-calf! Let me take you by your long silken jackass's ears and drive you at a gallop through the waxworks of our literature, among the clicking of Box Brownies, each taking its own monochrome snapshots of so-called reality! Together we will circumvent the furies and become celebrated for our depiction of the English scene, of English life which moves to the stately rhythm of an autopsy! (Clea 116).

Finally, Darley does in fact catch on to Pursewarden's higher purpose and writes:

> seeing Pursewarden thus, for the first time I saw that through his work he had been seeking the very tenderness of logic itself, of the Way Things Are; not the logic of

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> syllogism or the tidemarks of emotions, but the real essence of fact-finding, the naked truth, the Inkling ... the whole pointless Joke (Clea 167).

Durrell's characters in the Quartet reflect, in a rather self conscious manner, the postmodernists' fascination with observer determined reality, anti-determinism, and the re-definition of the physical principles underlying the structure of the natural world. These concerns arose directly out of Einstein's theory of relativity, which in turn advanced the quantum theory and opened a new realm of physical phenomena. With general relativity he combined the ideas of space, time, energy, matter, and geometry into a coherent whole of enormous scope and implication. The result, a permanent change in the way reality is perceived, provided postmodern literary artists with a new context in which to create fiction.

With classical definitions of reality overthrown, postmodernist writers and theorists have been forced to acknowledge that previously held ideas as to the forms and functions of literature no longer apply. In a post-Einsteinian universe commonsense notions of what the world is like cannot be maintained, and consequently the mimetic function of literature becomes largely irrelevant. This, too, is the basis for much of theoretical physics. Jacob Bronowski notes: "Science, like art, is not a copy of nature, but a recreation of her. We remake nature by the act of discovery, in the poem or in the theorem" (20). Israel Sheffler goes one step further and asserts that " reality itself is made by the scientist rather than discovered by him" (19). Furthermore, in a quantum universe, or a universe dependent upon the laws of general relativity, Gerald Graff holds the view that "the factual observation-statements of science are verifiable, [but] the materialistic metaphysics which licenses empiricism itself is as mythical as any poetic belief" (137). Clearly, these views represent a shift away from the classical determinism that unifies modernist fiction, where there is a great deal more

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emphasis on autonomous structure and design of the individual work. The indeterminate reality of the post-Einsteinian , and postmodern, universe opens fiction to the potential suggested by continuous, non-mimetic space-time and the quantum theory: randomness, multiple realities, anti-linearity and fragmentation of narratives, as well as the establishment of a reader-text continuum. Philip Stevick writes:

> Theoretically, postmodern fiction is related to deconstructionist theory in its desire to be free of the tyranny of mimesis, reality itself being a false image in the mirror that literature has traditionally held up to life. Postmodern fiction strives to be an autotelic art form, serving not the "real" world, but itself (147).

The literature resulting from this freedom from "the tyranny of mimesis" reflects the anti-interpretive world of theoretical physics, particularly at the quantum level of sub-atomic environments. One is hard pressed to imitate reality when it is unknown what exactly reality is. An alternative purpose must be found. Fiction that concerns itself with this dilemma therefore " does not even exist to abstract from or superimpose upon the world a thematic organization but ... exists as a non-mimetic object, made of words for its own sake " (Stevick 142). In terms of applying this idea to writing, William Gass notes: "Like the mathematician ... the novelist makes things out of concepts ... Because there's no narration among numbers. It is logically impossible. Time's lacking" (28). In the Quartet Pursewarden literally utilizes this idea when he posits his theory of the "n-dimensional novel trilogy," one of the 'Workpoints' provided at the end of Justine (198). He is very much intrigued by the non-Euclidean geometry of space-time in terms of its implications for literature. He claims that his prose is part of the "poetic continuum" and "is intended to give a stereoscopic effect to character. And events aren't in serial form but collect here and there like quanta, like real life." (Balthazar 245). Insofar as Pursewarden is a partial representative of Durrell, the same holds true for

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Durrell's prose in the Quartet, where the concept is carried through all of the four volumes both structurally and in terms of characterization.

Randomness, fragmentation, and time frame shifts are elements in postmodern prose, and the Quartet is full of various devices – dream and memory sequences, diaries, notebooks, multiple perspectives, stories within stories – assembled into what seems like an anti-narrative collage. Moreover, each book ends with a section of 'Workpoints' designed to convey the true sense of a continuum; in space-time there are no beginnings or endings. Each workpoint is like a single thread extending from the edge of an enormous tapestry of rich and complex design; one has only to take up the thread and continue weaving to further the design of the tapestry, and indeed become part of it. This can be continued into infinity. Astructurality is indicated by the Quartet's tendency towards layering realities and quasidirectional time frames. That is, "The reader is made to curve back toward the point of origin, varying again and again the old patterns at new levels..." so that "Directionality is always relative to the observer, and there is no stability except momentarily. Always there are more directions to be explored" (90).

This is further supported by the treatment of time and space in the Quartet. As the character most passionately in pursuit of "truth", that is, an integrated sense of reality, Darley spends considerable energy searching for meanings to events and characters. He assembles a battery of signposts in space time: witnesses, letters, rumors, paintings, Justine's and Nessim's diaries, Arnauti's Moeurs. Soon, though, he finds himself confronted with the dilemma of relativistic space-time: how to combine the myriad variables in such a way as to approach the "true" version of reality? Frustrated, he finds "the fulcrum of his vision was disturbed and other scenes gravely intervened, disregarding congruence and period, disregarding historic time and common probability " (Justine

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145), and Darley's struggle to define the structure of the Quartet from the "inside" perspective is presented most effectively in his near-obsession with Pursewarden's suicide; he recalls their last conversation:

> The fact that this was our last meeting has invested it, in retrospect, with a significance which surely it cannot have possessed. Nor ... has he ceased to exist: he has simply stepped into the mirror we all must – which is the memory of our friends. Yet the presence of death always refreshes experience thus – that is, its function is to help us deliberate upon the novelty of time. Yet at that moment we were both situated at points equidistant from death ... "

Later he muses,

> How much of him can I claim to know? I realize that each person can claim only one aspect of our character as part of his knowledge. To everyone we turn a different face of the prism. Over and over again I have found myself surprised by observations which brought this home to me (Justine 99-100).

Finally, Darley concludes:

> Death provided a new critical referent, and a new mental stature to the tiresome, brilliant, ineffectual and often tedious man with whom we had to cope. He was only to be seen now through the distorting mirror of anecdote or the dusty spectrum of memory (Justine 137).

This peculiar device, whereupon characters within the Quartet give voice to the mechanics of construction used by Durrell himself – and do so under the pretext of discussing something else entirely – is characteristic of the self-referential tone in postmodernism. It is the self-consciousness of the Quartet that encourages the reader to not only be entertained or instructed by the text, but also to take a look at the elaborate ideological infrastructure on which the story is pinned, the foundation of which is relativity theory. In such an environment Darley's continual search for temporal and spatial autonomy, while enlightening both for himself and for the reader, is nevertheless

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doomed to failure. At various stages of his progress through the space-time of the Quartet's word continuum he is given to making observations like the following:

> Here I thought the whole story through from beginning to end, starting in the days before I ever knew Melissa and ending somewhere soon in the idle pragmatic death in a city to which I did not belong, I say that I thought it through ... not as a personal history with an individual accent so much as part of the historical fabric of the place. I described it to myself as part and parcel of the city's behavior ... It was as if my imagination had become subtly drugged by the ambience of the place, and could not respond to personal individual assessments (Justine 152).

As he struggles to write a definitive composite story about the world of Alexandria and the bizarre circle of friends he has made there, Darley finds himself confronted with the distorting power of memory and the fragmentation of his experiential history, represented by an assortment of odd keepsakes that have randomly come into his possession, and yet are all crucial to unraveling the "true" story told in the Quartet:

> the memory of friends, of incidents long past. Th e slow unreality of time begins to grip them, blurring the outlines – so that sometimes I wonder whether these pages record the actions of real human beings; or whether this is not simply the story of a few inanimate objects which precipitated drama around them – I mean a black patch [Capodistria's], a watch-key [Balthazar's] and a couple of dispossessed wedding rings [Cohen and Melissa's] (Justine 194).

Soon Darley realizes that the non-linear dimensionality of time and all it encompasses – space, thought, history, action, humanity – yields no more for the artist than it does for the work of art he creates:

> ... in order to go on, it is necessary to go back: not that anything I wrote about them is untrue, far from it. Yet when I wrote, the full facts were not at my disposal. The picture I drew was a provisional one – like the picture of a lost civilization deduced from a few fragmented vases, an inscribed tablet, an amulet, some human bones, a gold smiling death-mask (Balthazar 2).

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This fragmented aspect of Darley's biography of the Alexandrians, and his need to revise his perspective with every reading, with every passing day, and with every new piece of information each day reveals; all of this is characteristic of both postmodernist literature and relativity theory. About the former Philip Stevick states:

> If we understand modernism as placing a special importance upon structure and design ... insisting upon the artistic autonomy of the individual work, then recent works will seem to be different from that modernist norm, opposed to it, perhaps, since there often appears to be a willed randomness in contemporary fiction, a pleasure in the fragmentary, a sense, at times, quite opposite of that modernist respect for the integrity of the artistic object, namely a willingness to flirt with the work's frivolity and inconsequence (137).

The concept of a fragmentary, randomly constructed work of literature is also integral in the validation of other aspects of postmodern fiction such as the dissolution of linear time frames, the insistence on an anti-objective concept of reality, the plurality of perspectives, and the active engagement of the reader with the text. Einstein's work, moreover, clearly showed the lack of viability inherent in a world view presupposing fixed dimensions in which natural laws could be enacted with empirically predictable results. (Of course, invariants such as gravity exist as exceptions to this view.) Culturally, this led to the unsettling conclusion that the universe consistently defies man's attempts to impose uniformity, order, and systematization on physical reality, that the natural world is in fact governed by an infinite and – at least to human ways of perceiving – incomprehensible force characterized by arbitrariness and fragmentation. As Gerald Graff asserts

> As advances in knowledge became more spectacular, society was plagued by a sense of the discrepancy between the pervasiveness of intellectual analysis and the poverty of its results, between the avidity with which knowledge was pursued and its inability to answer questions of pressing human importance. With the proliferation of scientific knowledge, men felt oppressed rather than enlightened, by "explanations" (41).

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Historically, man has not responded very well, either physically or psychologically, to loss of control over his environment, and yet quantum and relativistic physics have presented him with a universe where his control over the circumstances of his existence are at best limited. The same holds true for the "reality" he perceives to be everyday life. In postmodernist literature the response to these radical and bewildering shifts in knowledge about the "real" world has been what Philip Stevick calls the "erosion of that linear, causal arrangement of words, presumably as a form more fragmented, less end-directed, more playfully aware of itself," leading to a fluid, improvisatory, non-linear "oral" sense of literary form (143). In a universe where there can be no control, postmodernist writers have solved the problem by taking control of the lack of control and making it a key feature of a new literary form.

Durrell uses this device in the Alexandria Quartet not only in the form of the quartet itself, but as a feature of several characters' lives. Apart from Darley's continual and ultimately useless quest to write the events of his Alexandrian odyssey as they really are, there is also the observation by Arnauti, Justine's ex-husband, quoted by Darley out of his autobiographical study of Justine entitled Moeurs (which, ironically, appears in Darley's/Durrell's own biographical treatment of Justine):

> " I dream of a book powerful enough to contain elements of Claudia [his code name for Justine] ... but it is not the sort of book to which we are accustomed these days. For example, on the first page a synopsis of the plot in a few lines. Thus we might dispense with the narrative articulation. What follows would be a drama freed from the burdens of form. I would set my own book free to dream " (Justine 66).

Pursewarden, especially, embodies in a character the Durrellian quest for freedom from the severe limitations of pre-postmodernist literary form; freedom which he believes lies in "the heraldic universe," which is the universe comprising those elements outside the relative realm of human life;

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elements, moreover, that encompass both the known and the unknown, yet still influence the configurations of human lives on a day to day basis. Einstein's relativistic universe is Pursewarden's heraldic universe, subtly altered to accommodate the vagaries of human experience. While Einstein initially resisted the anti-deterministic, anti-causal implications of quantum theory by sternly asserting that "God does not play dice" with the universe, Pursewarden, in true postmodernist fashion, cheekily embraces this aspect of the new world view by writing a trilogy, God Is A Humorist, whose title seems to be a response to Einstein's comment. As already noted earlier in this discussion, it is Pursewarden who encourages the more dogmatic Darley to abandon his plodding literary rhetoric in favor of a new form, the n-dimensional novel, and who reminds Darley that the multiplicity of time contained in a single moment cannot be represented by traditional literary forms. Therefore, when a despondent Darley laments "how thin is the fare which we moderns supply to our hungry readers " (Clea 140-141) we are reminded of Pursewarden's earlier query: "Should literature be a pathfinder or a bromide? Decide! Decide!" (Clea 118).

On the other hand, there is a distinctly Romantic undertone to Pursewarden's character, and an idealism more befitting a nineteenth than a mid-twentieth century writer. However, since postmodernism advocates a philosophy of openness and the attitude that all realities are valid realities, Pursewarden's romanticism becomes a legitimate part of the Quartet's postmodernist collage. In Clea, for example, he presents his dream of an "Ideal Commonwealth":

> The great schools of love will arise, and sensual and intellectual knowledge will draw their impetus from each other. The human animal will be uncaged, all his dirty cultural and coprolitic refuse of belief cleaned out. And the human spirit, radiating light and laughter, will softly tread the green grass like a dancer; will emerge to cohabit with the time-forms and give children to the world of the elementaries (Clea 131).

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Pursewarden shares Einstein's romanticism, although the latter is decidedly more restrained in his idealism:

> The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science ... Enough for me the mystery of the eternity of life, and the inkling of the marvellous structure of reality, together with the single-hearted endeavor to comprehend a portion ... of the reason that manifests itself in nature (The World As I See It, trans. Alan Harris 5).

The fragmentary, anti-structural philosophy permeates the Quartet in many respects besides Pursewarden's characterization, as evidenced by Durrell's extensive use of flashbacks, dreams, diaries, and loosely joined, episodic stories-within-stories. Furthermore, the four volumes themselves can be read in varying orders, each time providing a completely different perspective on the information, characters and responses to the Quartet. In this respect Durrell's Quartet echoes the "shuffle novels" of Marc Saporta, or Robert Coover's "The Gingerbread House," where the order in which a reader receives narrative information subserves the nature of that information and the individualized response of the reader. Durrell's concept of a "word continuum" is a function of the quartet's fragmentation and loose structure, resulting in a perpetual narrative.

Earlier in this discussion I referred to Durrell's characters in the Quartet as representative of sub-atomic particles, all moving through the Alexandrian landscape randomly, and interacting without apparent premeditated motive or cause, in a relativistic mode. By creating characters in such a fashion Durrell not only suggests the strangely sterile and anti-causal world of quantum interaction, he also presents a gallery of distinctly postmodern personalities, whose profiles closely resemble the definition of the postmodern hero, or anti-hero, proffered by Phillip Stevick:

> Responding to the problematics of the self, postmodernists have derived a method ... in which the human image takes on a two-dimensional cast, without much depth, yet

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> open to oddities, accidents, contingency, and banality in a way that classic characters could rarely be (Stevick 141).

Moreover, like the random and frequently astructural universe they inhabit, these characters possess

> lives less linear and whole, more improvisatory, often inscrutable, governed less by the thematics of their own composition than by the random assaults of a not very coherent world (Stevick 142).

This calls to mind the picaresque hero from which the postmodern hero partially derives; the disorderly literary character whose life is hallmarked by physical and psychological instability. In the picaro we see an exaggerated image of the internal chaos that so many people possess. Says Stuart Miller: "The picaro is neither a round nor a flat character ... having shifting traits that present no order, that seem random in their appearances and connections " (45-46).

A random, shifting, relativistic universe is best inhabited by characters whose own shifting traits and randomized behaviors are the perfect foil for their environment. We are reminded again of Justine's comment that "we are the children of our landscape; it dictates behavior and even thought in the measure to which we are responsive to it " (Justine 40). The characters of Durrell's Alexandrian world are wonderfully surrealistic, an assemblage of manic depressives, sexual deviants, geniuses, bored sophisticates, artists, writers, and utterly implausible denizens of Alexandria's demi-monde. In many ways they are caricatures; in some cases they turn out to be far more substantial than they initially appear, in other cases far less.

Justine, for example, the brooding and mysterious heroine of the first novel, appears at first to be a woman of exceptional intellectual insight and sensitivity haunted by an undisclosed tragedy in her past. She seems to be the absolute incarnation of the "woman with a past," whose restless siren song continually lures the men in her emotional orbit to their doom. Yet, for the most part Justine

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reveals herself to be intensely egocentric, neurotic, and less genuinely tragic than grossly self-indulgent. Regardless of which perception of her character the reader chooses to believe is more accurate or "real", there is a curious flatness about her character that keeps one from establishing any sense of connectedness with her, primarily because it becomes progressively harder to follow her through her many lies, manipulations, deceptions and emotional instabilities. As a result there is an air of alienation about Justine, both for the other characters who interact with her, and for the reader trying to establish who the "real" Justine is.

Ultimately she is consigned to the status of self-created myth, and it is the artist Clea who provides the definitive assessment of her character:

> It is our disease to want to contain everything within the frame of reference of a psychology or philosophy. After all, Justine cannot be justified or excused. She simply and magnificently is; we have to put up with her, like original sin. But to call her a nymphomaniac or to try and Freudianize her ... takes away all her mythical substance -- the only thing she really is. Like all amoral people she verges on the goddess. If our world were a world there would be temples where she would find the peace she's seeking. Temples where one could outgrow the sort of inheritance she has: not these damn monasteries full of pimply little Catholic youths who have made a bicycle seat of their sexual organs (Justine 68)

What Clea says of Justine -- that she "cannot be justified or excused," that she "simply and magnificently is" -- is true for all of Durrell's Alexandrians, and tends to be true of postmodern characters in general. Gerald Graff notes, "In postmodern fiction character, like external reality, is something about which nothing is known, lacking in plausible motive or discoverable depth" (53). William Gass reaffirms Clea's assessment in more general terms by theorizing that "characters, unlike ourselves, freed from existence, can shine like essence, and purely Be" (54). Durrell's characters exist in a relativistic universe where randomness is seemingly the rule and reality in a defined sense is a matter of which perspective, out of an infinite number of possible perspectives, an observer adopts.

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To survive, even to flourish, in such a universe, the Alexandrians move through their environment unanchored by anything other than their obsession for the city itself. Their passions for each other are typically tepid and short-lived, while those characters who dare to live with intense passion or to infuse their lives with emotional depth, inevitably die or are maimed, either physically or psychologically. Pombal, the lively French attaché who befriends Darley, is shot to death in a rowboat while trying to protect his pregnant mistress, Fosca. Scobie, the transvestite pedophile and ex-naval officer who heads the Alexandrian vice squad, is murdered trying to pick up sailors on the docks, and is ultimately deified by the Alexandrian habitueés, his bath tub declared a sacred shrine. Pursewarden, the vitriolic author and Darley's mentor/tormentor, commits suicide in the Mount Vulture Hotel to liberate emotionally his blind sister, Liza, with whom he has had an incestuous relationship, but who now wishes to form an alliance with the British diplomat, David Mountolive. Ironically, it is Mountolive who is summoned to handle the immediate aftermath of Pursewarden's death, whereupon he discovers Pursewarden's implausibly level-headed suicide note, which reads in part:

> "Ach! What a boring world we have created around us. The slime of plot ard counterplot. I have just recognized that it is not my world at all (I can hear you swearing as you read.)
>
> ***
>
> I'm tired, my dear chap, sick unto death, as the living say. And so ... Will you give my sister my love and say that my thoughts were with her? Thank you ...
>
> Affectionately yours,
> L.P."
>
> (Mountolive 166)

Finally, there is Narouz, Nessim's crude, wild-tempered, but prophetic brother, who dies an agonizing death before he can reveal to Clea his deep and passionate love for her:

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> Then lastly there burst from the hairy throat of the dying man a single tremendous word, the name of Clea, uttered in the cavernous voice of a wounded lion: a voice which combined anger, reproof and an overwhelming sadness in its sudden roar. So nude a word, her name, as simple as God or Mother — yet it sounded as if upon the lips of some dying conqueror, some lost king, conscious of the body and breath dissolving within it. The name of Clea sounded through the whole house, drenched by the splendor of his anguish, silencing the little knots of whispering servants and visitors, setting back the ears of the hunting dogs, making them crouch and fawn: ringing in Nessim's mind with a new and terrifying bitterness too deep for tears (Mountolive 285).

This sort of passionate emotionalism is only intensified by the static nature of the Quartet's other personalities. Unlike them, Narouz, Pombal, Pursewarden and Scobie are unable to adapt to the relativistic universe because they are incapable of the existential lassitude and objectivity necessary to inhabit an Einsteinian environment. In essence, they are modernist characters in a postmodernist world who succumb to forces they either cannot understand or, in the case of Pursewarden, will not tolerate. Or, as John Barth points out: "If the values of the universe are like the values of a novel, the truest thing about them is that they're by no means necessarily shared by the characters, or even comprehensible to them " (1952, 23).

Most of the other inhabitants of Durrell's Quartet do not possess the finely tuned sensibilities of the aforementioned four. By and large, these other characters move through the Alexandrian matrix without particular purpose and their interactions seem curiously devoid of meaning or pleasure, despite the fact that as delineated by the author, they are a colorful gallery of personalities. In terms of the concept of a space-time word continuum, character mingles with event in the same way that subject becomes continuous with object. This may explain the curious flatness in many of the characters; they are not solely personalities in the (modern) psychological sense, they are often archetypes, metaphors, and symbols in the hodgepodge of the relativistic universe. It all depends

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upon how they are presented to the reader by both the author and the other characters. Mythology and mysticism are two of the obvious sources for Durrell's Alexandrians as, for example, in the case of Melissa Artemis, the fragile prostitute and café dancer, whose essence is a seemingly paradoxical purity of spirit echoing her ancient Grecian namesake; there is also Clea Montis, the wise, golden haired painter whose fulfillment in life is constantly undermined by her spectacular beauty, which isolates her from the men she falls in love with. At one point Pombal says of Clea that it would be easier for a man to make love to her if she kept her face covered. She remains a lonely Aphrodite, despite passionate affairs with both Justine and, later, Darley. Lastly, there is Scobie, the deviant transvestite who has the gift of prophesy, very much like Tiresias, the blind prophet of Greek lore. Despite what he calls his "tendencies," Scobie projects an odd combination of nautical masculinity and garishly overdone femininity, using outrageous female clothing to lure visiting British sailors on the waterfront. After his death the Alexandrians enshrine him as El Scob, who sleeps with women to increase their fertility, and with men to restore potency. Suppliants come by the hundreds to pay homage to his sacred relic, an old iron bathtub.

> Postcard from Balthazar! Scobie's death was the greatest fun. How he must have enjoyed it! His pockets were filled with love-letters to his aide, Hassan, and the whole vice squad turned out to sob at his grave. All these black gorillas crying like babies. A very Alexandrian demonstration of affection. Of course the grave was too small for the coffin. The grave-diggers had knocked off for lunch, so a crack team of policemen was brought into action. Usual muddle. The coffin rolled over on its side and the old man nearly rolled out. Shrieks. The British Consul nearly died of shame. But all Alexandria was there and a good time was had by all ('Workpoints,' Justine 199-200).

Balthazar, an elderly, dapper psychiatrist, is, as his name suggests, a wise man, and like Scobie a bit of a seer. As Carl Bode suggests, Balthazar is one of several characters derived from those portrayed on the Key cards of the Tarot deck:

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> He is very probably based on the Key card of the magician. The Magician and Balthazar are both occult philosophers, hermetic adepts; the Magician has the power of healing, and Balthazar is by profession a physician. The Magician holds a two-ended phallic wand; Balthazar acts as a man and a woman both [since he is homosexual]. A further point is that the Magician has black hair, the black of ignorance, but on it he wears the white crown of knowledge. Balthazar's hair is at first dark under the dark hat he habitually wears, then whitens when he has endured enough suffering to give him wisdom (212).

The wisdom is gained after his failed suicide attempt over the lost affection of a Greek actor, and he is forced to endure a long, painful and emotionally humiliating recuperation.

There is also Capodistria, the character who bears remarkable resemblance to the Key card of the Devil. Capodistria has a goatlike face, complete with a tufted beard and strongly arched eyebrows; he is imbued with a distinctly serpentine demeanor, all of which qualities suggest an association with the Devil. Furthermore,

> [t]he Devil's personal sign is Capricorn; in addition he personifies serpent-power. The key to Capodistria's character is his hidebound concentration on one half of human experience, the fleshy sexual half. This same defect he shares with the Devil. The Devil is shown sitting on half a cube; Capo is pictured as having only half of his sight — a black patch covers one eye. In his left hand the Devil holds a burning torch upside down, a perfect image of a phallus used wastefully and not for creation (Bode 212).

In the post-Einsteinian universe the dimensions defined by mythicism and mysticism may be considered — relativistically — as potentially legitimate as the tangible world of everyday experience. This philosophy is clearly reflected in Durrell's Alexandrians. The traditionally defined concepts of "real" and "unreal" become interchangeable, and as a result a literary environment is created in which both "real" and "unreal" characters can co-exist. In "How To Make a Universe" Barth alludes to this phenomenon:

> The hero of my first novel begins by believing that "nothing makes any ultimate difference," and decides to end his life; he ends by realizing that if nothing makes any difference, that truth makes no ultimate difference either, and so rather than

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> committing suicide he predicts that he'll go on living in much the same manner as before. Yet obviously there will be a kind of difference from then on....He goes on about his daily round as always, but he is every moment leaping perfectly and surely into the infinite, the absurd, and every moment falling smoothly and just as surely back into the finite (25).

In the Quartet Pursewarden chooses "the infinite" and takes a dose of cyanide, while Balthazar, although attempting to make the same choice, fails and is forced to return to the "absurd," albeit with "a kind of difference" in that he achieves newfound wisdom.

There are several other characters, both major and minor, whose juxtaposition heightens one's sense of disbelief that they can all exist within the pages of the same book; combined, they present the reader with a veritable collage of literary personalities. Mnemjian is the violet-eyed Egyptian barber whose shop is a hub of intrigue and information for Alexandrian society. Memlik Pasha is a highly placed and cruel minister whose sadistic bribe-taking empire and mediaeval dictatorship over his underlings is a bizarre contrast to the sophisticated world of Justine and Nessim Hosnani, Darley and Pursewarden. Toto de Brunel, yet another of Durrell's psychosexual deviants, is typical of the eccentrics who drift in and out of the balls and carnivals of the Quartet's pre-war Alexandria. In Balthazar, Toto is stabbed to death with a hatpin in a case of mistaken identity and is thus hastily dispatched from the space-time of the Quartet. David Mountolive, who takes over as narrator in the third volume, is the English ambassador to Egypt, close friend of Nessim Hosnani, and lover of Nessim's mother, Leila. His story, begun sketchily in Balthazar, becomes the focus of Mountolive, where he is portrayed as the handsome, urbane, and popular Sir David, whose life is a continuous round of parties and tiresome official functions. It is Mountolive who must handle the immediate after-effects of Pursewarden's suicide, and who falls deeply in love with Pursewarden's blind sister, and former lover, Liza. Through her he discovers the long incestuous relationship of

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Liza and Pursewarden, and about their dead child, and he must do psychological battle with himself in an effort to accept the preposterous situation, one so far outside the realm of his dull, smoothly-run British lifestyle.

Dr. Amaril, another minor but recurring character, is followed throughout the Quartet in his pursuit of the timid, mysterious Semira who, it turns out, is missing her nose because of a birth defect. Amaril, who was at one time Clea's lover, pursues his veiled mistress through the pages of the four volumes until, when he discovers her tragic secret, he proposes marriage and as his betrothal gift to her promises to construct a new nose for her before their wedding. Clea joins the project, providing the sketches and plaster models from which Amaril works. Finally, in a bizarre variation on a debutante ball, Semira and her new nose are "presented" to Alexandrian high society. Darley observes:

> I was suddenly quite touched to see the shy way that Semira hesitated on the threshold of that crowded ballroom; despite the magnificence of her dress and grooming the watching eyes intimidated her, made her lose her self-possession. ... But in this moment of charming irresolution Amaril came up behind her and took her arm. He himself looked, I thought, rather white and nervous despite the customary foppishness of his attire (Clea 177).

The Primary characters in the Quartet move back and forth across the word continuum by functioning as both subjects and objects, observers of, and participants in, the strange world of Durrell's Alexandria. As a result they contribute to the overall sense of self-reflexiveness and self-consciousness that pervade the Quartet. In a relativistic cosmos, the individual feels isolated and somewhat alienated in an infinite and constantly shifting universe, a universe in which human concepts of perception and reality have little true value in an empirical sense. Consequently, there is recurrent representation of self-consciousness in postmodernist literature, and of individual

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alienation, not from society (as is the case in premodernist and modernist fiction) but from the world itself. Relativity indirectly catalyzed the formulation of postmodern characters by radically changing the scope and perspective from which observable physical reality and the laws of nature are considered. The character's response, and often the author's as well, is to turn away from the unpredictable and seemingly incomprehensible vastness of post-Einsteinian reality, opting instead to turn back into the self, creating a secure once-remove from the overwhelming prospect of facing an irrational universe. John Barth discusses the effect of the postmodernist world view on both the author and the characters he creates:

> Consider even the fundamental problem of being, that starting-place of ontology and religion, and no doubt the profoundest brain teaser in human thought.
>
> ***
>
> The problem is two-fold: Why does the universe exist at all, when, as Schopenhauer says, we can not only conceive of its nonexistence, but perhaps even wish it? Such is the sentiment of Paul Valery when he calls the universe "a blot on the perfection of nonexistence." And second, granting the existence of being, why is anything in the universe the way it is instead of some other way, which we can readily imagine? Why must every action have an equal and opposite reaction, instead of, say, a proportionate one, or in every tenth instance none at all? Why must falling bodies accelerate at just 32 feet per second squared, and not 31 or 33? Why must Jupiter have twelve moons and Italy be shaped like a boot and the date of the Norman Conquest be AD 1066 and all Gaul be divided into three parts and one's wife have a freckle on her elbow? Except to true Believers, all the "reasons" are proximate, contingent of earlier and equally arbitrary facts; but the question is ultimate (20).

He further adds:

> How arbitrary it all is! Even if one sees the beauty in it, as I do, how arbitrary!
>
> ***
>
> It seems to me that it is insight into the blind arbitrariness of physical fact, together with the gross finality of it, that upsets the thoughtful young person ...
>
> ***

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> ... if our chap is of harder nervous stuff and artist to the bone, he may not even discuss the philosophical question as such, but intuitively embrace it and set to making universes of his own ... (21).

Durrell certainly formulates his own universe, fashioned out of the stuff of post-Einsteinian reality, and his Alexandrians are the ideal creations for this particular universe. In one way or another they augment the "constructed" and therefore self-reflexive tone of the Quartet. They resemble the postmodern character as defined by William Gass in "The Concept of Character in Fiction":

> Characters in fiction are mostly empty canvas. I have known many who have passed through their stories without noses [like Durrell's literally noseless Semira] or heads to hold them; others have lacked bodies altogether, exercised no natural functions, possessed some thoughts, a few emotions, but no psychologies, and apparently made love without the necessary organs (45).

Minor characters notwithstanding, the Quartet is an amazingly self-conscious piece of literature, often parodic, although at times Durrell comes perilously close to literary moralizing. Nor is he as extreme in his self-reflexiveness as later postmodernists, as this exerpt from John Barth's Lost In the Funhouse demonstrates:

> O God comma I abhor self-consciousness. I despise what we have come to; I loath our loathesome loathing, our place our time our situation, our loathesome art, this ditto necessary story. The blank of our lives. It's about over. Let the denoument be soon and unexpected, painless if possible, quick at least, above all soon. Now now! How in the world will it ever (13).

Nevertheless, the Quartet is rich in self-commentary, self-analysis, and literary self-criticism by its various narrators, including (obliquely) Durrell himself. When not self-conscious, the Quartet is self-conscious about self-consciousness. The characters who most serve this aspect of the tetralogy are Darley and Pursewarden. In fact, they are foils for each other, representing the antithetical extremes between objective realism (Darley) and the infinite possibilities of the subjective imagination (Pursewarden). Darley's struggle towards artistic autonomy is symbolic of the modernist writer's

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journey into the "new reality" of a post-Einsteinian world, while Pursewarden embodies the postmodern writer who has assimilated and adapted to the new cosmic perspective, and from the perspective of death (Darley only reads Pursewarden's diaries – the real revelations of his character – after the latter's suicide) looks back to deliver his own literary criticism to the still-floundering Darley:

> In me he [Darley] scents an enigma, something crying out for the probe. ("But, Brother Ass, I am as clear as a bell — a dancing bell! The problem is there, here, nowhere!") At times while he is talking like this I have the sudden urge to jump on his back and ride him frantically up and down Rue Fuad, thrashing him with a thesaurus ...
>
> ***
>
> "What is that? Did you say that you wished to contribute to English literature? What, to arrange a few sprigs of parsley over this dead turbot? To blow diligently into the nostrils of this corpse? Have you mobilized your means, Brother Ass? ... for if by chance a work of art should cross the Channel it would be sure to be turned back at Dover on the grounds of being improperly dressed! It is not easy, Brother Ass. (perhaps it would be wisest to ask the French for intellectual asylum?) But I see you will not heed me."
>
> ***
>
> But I have taken my own precautions against a nation of mental grannies. Each of my books bears a scarlet wrapper with the legend: NOT TO BE OPENED BY OLD WOMEN OF EITHER SEX (Clea 116-117)

The criticism continues, and it becomes apparent that even in death Pursewarden exerts a powerful influence over the younger artist, Darley, as well as the other characters in the Quartet:

> Brother Ass, I will tell you a short story. A team of Chinese anthropologists arrived in Europe to study our habits and beliefs. Within weeks they were all dead. They died of uncontrollable laughter and were buried with full military honors! What do you make of that? We have turned ideas into a paying form of tourism (Clea 118).

Finally, Pursewarden arrives at the point of recognition of the existential dilemmas facing post-Einsteinian writers:

> Brother Ass, we have the hardest lesson of all to learn as yet –that truth cannot be forced but must be allowed to plead for itself! (Clea 121).

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And:

> ...you see, we Anglo-Saxons are incapable of thinking for ourselves; about, yes. In thinking about ourselves we put up every kind of pretty performance in every sort of voice, from cracked Yorkshire to the hot-potato-in-the-mouth of the BBC. There we excel for we see ourselves at one remove from reality, as a subject under a microscope. The idea of objectivity is really a flattering extension of our sense of humbug. When you start to think for yourself it is impossible to cant -- and we live by cant! (Clea 125).

There are many striking parallels between Pursewarden's (and, by extension, Durrell's) literary criticism and that of several leading proponents of the postmodern scene. If deeply-felt ennui was the zeitgeist of the late nineteenth century and its literature, persistent uneasiness is the watch word of mid- to late-twentieth century writers creating under the rubric of postmodernism. Certainly, Pursewarden's lengthy indictments of his literary predecessors — and of Darley's plodding creative process — echo the observations made by critics like Robert Scholes who examine the etiology of this preoccupation with self-reflectiveness in literature:

> Criticism has taken the very meaning of 'aboutness' away from us. It has taught us that language is tautological, if it is not nonsense, and to the extent that it is about anything, it is about itself ... criticism is about the impossibility of its own existence (233).

Pursewarden writes:

> Yes, Brother Ass, the choice of a style is most important, in the market garden of our culture you will find strange and terrible blooms with every stamen standing erect. O to write like Ruskin! When poor Effie Gray tried to get to his bed, he'd shoo the girl away! O to write like Carlyle! Haggis of the mind. When a Scotsman comes to town can spring be far behind? No. Everything you say is truthful and full to point; relative truth, and somewhat pointless point, but nevertheless I will try and think about this invention of the scholiasts, for clearly style is as important to you as matter to me (Clea 124).

In Literature Against Itself Gerald Graff explains further the problem alluded to by Pursewarden, where the writer must "find a standpoint from which to represent the diffuse,

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intransigent material of contemporary experience without surrendering critical perspective to it" (238).

Ironically, the self-conscious posturing of post-Einsteinian postmodernists is not as self-referential as it is taken to be, since its very reflexivity depends upon making "realistic" observations about the historical circumstances that served as its precursors. This commentary, while purporting to uphold the idea that in the bewildering matrix of the relativistic cosmos "artifice is the only reality." (Meisel, 34), nevertheless presses its antirealism into the service of a higher realism. As Pursewarden notes, "How slowly one learns to embrace the paradox" (Clea 129). At one point he prophetically scrawls his own epitaph on a mirror with his shaving stick: "I never knew which side my art was buttered/ Were the Last Words that poor Pursewarden uttered!'" (Clea 122).

Pursewarden's self-consciousness would tend to become tiresome except for the fact that – in true self-reflexive fashion – we are forewarned by Clea's neatly synoptic assessment of his personality in the first volume of the Quartet, where she proclaims:

> How greatly Pursewarden has gained in stature since his death! I see now that what we found enigmatic about the man was due to a fault in ourselves. ...underneath all his preoccupation with sex, society, religion, etc. ... there is, quite simply, a man tortured beyond endurance by the lack of tenderness in the world (Justine 194).

Pursewarden, however, transcends the lack of tenderness in the only way left to him, having failed to convince the world to abandon the old order for the new world view ("Who dares to dream of capturing the fleeting image of truth in all its gruesome multiplicity?" he asks in Clea). Death is the ultimate transcension, yet Durrell reminds us that in a relativistic universe where time and space are redefined the meaning of transcension is just another instance of questionable perspective. In

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Surfiction: Fiction Now ... And Tomorrow John Barth correlates this idea with the postmodern aesthetic:

> an artist may paradoxically turn the felt intimacies of our time into material and means for his work – paradoxically because by doing so he transcends what had appeared to be his refutation, in the same way that the mystic who transcends finitude is said to be enabled to live, physically and spiritually, in the finite world (27).

There is no other character in the Quartet who commands as much time and space as Pursewarden does, and although the rest of the Alexandrians shed considerable light on his personality, he remains more of a device and a symbol than a fully developed character in the modernist sense. He is a construction, both of Durrell's need for a mouthpiece to comment on the state of English literature – both his own and others' – and of Pursewarden's idiosyncratic tendency to vent his frustration with Darley's misguided (in his view) journey towards artistic autonomy. In his artificiality Pursewarden is thus representative of what Gerald Graff sees as a uniquely postmodernist phenomenon:

> If artifice is the only reality the old-fashioned disctinctions between "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" literature and life, are abolished. Literature and life are thus reconciled, but only by the strategy of enclosing "life" itself in an autonomous process of textuality which cannot refer beyond its structuring activity (61).

Pursewarden is fascinating not so much for who he is, but for what he is: a self-conscious artist in a self-reflexive novel, speaking against the self-consciousness in a body of literature that is most emphatically self-conscious, not just aware of being so. Mockingly, he says:

> Quick, they are waiting, those hypnogogic figures among the London minarets, the muezzin of the trade. "Does curate get girl as well as stipend, or only stipend? Read the next thousand pages and find out!" English life in the raw — like some pious melodrama acted by criminal churchwardens sentenced to a lifetime of sexual misgivings! In this way we can put a tea-cosy over reality to our mutual advantage, writing it all in the plain prose which is only just distinguishable from galvanized iron. In this way we will put a lid on a box with no sides! Brother Ass, let us conciliate a world of listless curmudgeons who read to verify, not their intuitions, but their prejudices! (Clea 128)

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How does the concept of self-reflexivity in postmodern literature relate to relativity theory? Relativity presents a world view inconsistent with the perceived "reality" of everyday experience. This being the case, man has been forced to examine himself more closely in terms of his placement in the relativistic universe. In his essay "The Literature of Replenishment" John Barth asserts:

> It did happen: Freud and Einstein and two world wars and the Russien and sexual revolutions and automobiles and airplanes and telephones and radios and movies and urbanization, and now nuclear weaponry and television and microchip technology and the new feminism and the rest, and except as readers there's no going back to Tolstoy and Dickens (202).

Evgeny Zamyatin, in "On Literature, Revolution and Entropy," notes that while Euclid's world is very simple and Einstein's is exceedingly complex, it is nevertheless impossible to go back to the pre-Einsteinian perspective (202). Durrell's Quartet, as a relativistic construct and a word continuum, is representative of the postmodern writer's need to place himself and his literature in a universe where the concept of "place-ness" has no definite meaning. Natural laws are redefined, and in the fallout from the resultant cultural upheaval, artists have sought an escape hatch. Even in a relativistic cosmos, an artist can retain a certain degree of perceptual security by either constructing a completely controllable universe -- be it relativistic or otherwise -- or seeking asylum within the self. and becoming an objective witness to his own experiences within that universe. José Ortega y Gasset adds: "Our interest has shifted from the plot to the figures, from actions to persons. Now this transference ... finds a counterpart in what has ... been happening in physics and, above all, in philosophy." (67) Furthermore, he observes,

> Microcosm and macrocosm are equally cosmos; they differ only in the size of their radii; but for a being that lives inside, each has a constant absolute size. We are reminded of Poincaré's remark -- which foreshadows the theory of relativity -- that if

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> everything in our world contracted and shrank in the same proportion, we should not notice the difference (90).

Self-reflexivity in literary postmodernism is, then, partially an escapist device — similar to the Romantic proclivity for escaping the depressing world of industrialization and invoking the ren~m~ of gothic romance and the landscape of the Sublime — allowing the inhabitants of the relativistic universe to find solace in the very chaos and absurdity they want to evade. Describing the source of self-monitoring in his own fiction, John Barth explains:

> self-consciousness, even self-reflexiveness, are so much in the cultural air we breathe now that they can have an innocence of their own. I am reminded of this paradox by every Woody Allen movie, every television news show opening shot of the camera filming the cameras filming John Chancellor or Walter Cronkite watching the monitors showing the cameras, etc.: naive unselfconscious self-consciousness (212).

Barth's words remind us of the hall-of-mirrors writing that Durrell uses to create multiple perspectives on his Alexandrian characters. In fact, mirrors are everywhere in the Quartet, further metaphorical evidence of its self-consciousness; one of the first scenes in Justine describes her standing before the many reflections of her dressmaker's mirror, observing that if she were a writer she would show how one person can have many sides. Pursewarden writes his epitaph on a shaving mirror, the writing thus blocking out the "true" reflections of its author with a boldly self-conscious act. In each case the point is made that what the characters see in their mirrors are not images of their "real" selves, but merely one of many possible "real" images, created and distorted or inverted ones, at that. In the relativistic universe art can no longer be the mirror of life, because the mirror cannot be trusted; but then, from the mirror's point of view, neither can the reflectee. Moreover, the characters themselves are mirrors for each other, continually creating, refining, adding to and clarifying the images presented to the reader. Self-consciousness in postmodern fiction is an

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alternative impulse to the modernist tendency for interpreting the universe as it really is, since after Einstein's theory of relativity the nature of the "real" universe has no single "true" interpretation.

Durrell's awareness of his self-consciousness is explicated fully in the character of Pursewarden who, though highly sensitized to the importance of the historical precedents he abhors in the formulation of his own aesthetic, chooses to embrace the new order, with a simultaneous wink and nod directed toward the ultimate futility of doing so. Yet in Pursewarden's castigations of Darley we see what Jacques Derrida calls "the joyful Nietzchean affirmatiion of the world and the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs which has no truth, no nostalgic guilt, and is proffered for active interpretation" (247). This is the world that Darley as author struggles with, and as such his journey through The Alexandria Quartet is one founded on "the innocence of becoming." Derrida concludes that "this affirmation then determines the non-center otherwise than as a loss of the center. And it plays the game without security" (264). Not possessing the postmodernist's parodic self-awareness, Darley learns this game the hard way, trying again and again to capture what he realizes are the "charmless photographs of a reality which overreaches the realm of the poet's scope" (Clea 215) or "the order of natural events which time revises according to its own caprices" (Clea 225) until, at the end of the Quartet he concludes:

> It is not hard writing at this remove in time, to realize that it had all already happened, had been ordained in such a way and in no other. This was, so to speak, only its "coming to pass" -- its stage of manifestation. But the scenario had already been devised elsewhere, the actors chosen, the timing rehearsed down to the last detail in the mind of that invisible author -- which perhaps would prove to be only the city itself: the Alexandria of the human estate. The seeds of future events are carried within ourselves. They are implicit in us and unfold according to the laws of their own nature (Clea 215).

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The closing words of the Quartet are Darley's, and they mark the fulfillment of Pursewarden's (read Durrell's) vision for the younger artist. Darley writes, from the vantage point of his newfound literary consciousness, of what he calls "the secret landscape" which "had been so long in forming inside me":

> Yes, one day I found myself writing down with trembling fingers the four words (four letters! four faces!) with which every story-teller since the world began has staked his claim to the attention of his fellow-men. Words which presage simply the old story of an artist coming of age. I wrote: "Once upon a time ..."
> And I felt as if the whole universe had given me a nudge! (Clea 275).

Darley's self-reflexiveness, unlike Pursewarden's, is arrived at after an arduous, studied, at times agonized, trial by ordeal. Like his premodernist and modernist precursors, Darley is a meticulous and psychoanalytical craftsman whose approach to creating literature is serious. Ultimately Darley and Pursewarden — both being partial literary incarnations of Durrell — reach a point of philosophical confluence, although by vastly disparate routes. Darley assesses Pursewarden's legacy in a lengthy, newly-enlightened commentary:

> The letters! Ferocious, sulky, brilliant, profuse — the torrent of words in that close hand flowed on and on endlessly, studded with diamond-hard images, a wild self-analytical frenzy of despair, remorse and passion. ... With an interior shock I realized that there was nothing in the whole length and breadth of our literature with which to compare them! ... Literature I say! ... Here illusion and reality were fused in one single blinding vision of a perfect incorruptible passion which hung over the writer's mind like a dark star — the star of death!
>
> ***
>
> I thought with shame of the shabby passages in the Justine manuscript which I had devoted to him — to my image of him! I had, out of envy or unconscious jealousy, invented a Pursewarden to criticize. In everything I had written there I had accused him only of my own weaknesses ... (Clea 167).

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Finally: Blind as a mole, I had been digging about in the graveyard of relative piling up of data, more information, and completely missing the mythopoeic reference which underlies fact. I had called this searching for truth!

***

And seeing Pursewarden thus, for the first time, I saw that through his work he had been seeking for the very tenderness of logic itself, of the Way Things Are; not the logic of syllogism or the tide-marks of emotions, but the real essence of fact-finding, the naked truth, the Inkling ... the whole pointless Joke. Yes, Joke! (Clea 167).

Quite obviously, then, the literary self-consciousness catalyzed by relativity is in large measure concerned with re-evaluating the actual activity of literary creation in the face of the artist's estrangement from an intelligible reality. The self-parody evident in postmodernist literature is part of the extreme reaction to this alienation. Gerald Graff notes: "Perceiving that the modernist's seriousness rests on admittedly arbitrary foundations, the postmodern writer treats this seriousness as an object of parody" (55). At one point Pursewarden interjects, "I see that I am in danger of taking myself as seriously as I should! And this is an unpardonable offense " (Clea 123). In The Performing Self: Compositions and Decompositions in the Language of Contemporary Life, Richard Poirier explains that while traditionally parody suggests that life, history, or reality has superceded certain literary forms, the self-parodic postmodern aesthetic remains quite unsure of the relevance of such standards, and makes fun of the effort even to verify them by the act of writing (27-28). Although John Barth concurs with this view, he injects a note of moderation:

> If part of the energy of such a novel happens to come from a "performing" authorial self, as it conceivably might, we shall look for that self to be at least as self-knowing and self-controlled, perhaps even as self-effacing, as it is self-conscious (214).

The performance aspect is significant in that "Performance," writes Poirier, "creates life in literature in that it is itself evidence of life. It is a way of being present, in every sense of that word " (44). It is not surprising that in a cosmos where reality has been usurped by the laws of relativity and

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quantum mechanics, and where "artifice is the only reality," performance — that is, created reality — is the replacement of choice. Given this interpretation, self-consciousness in postmodernism parallels the development of performance art in theatre and the visual arts.

Self-parody as a manifestation of self-reflexivity in fiction, along with the intervention of the authorial presence, are not the only hallmarks of performance in postmodern literature. Fabulation is another distinctive identifying "field mark", as John Barth calls it. Postmodernist writers are united in the rediscovery of the pleasures of story-telling, especially when freed from the dictates of probability. Relativity presupposes that the "normally" absurd or improbable is potentially valid, a concept that when translated into a literary medium enriches the texture of fiction and allows for the juxtaposition of the everyday with the fantastic or the grotesque. Philip Stevick observes:

> A fabulist is a tale teller. Tellers of tales enjoy their work, and it shows. There is a kind of buoyancy and pleasure of invention, in a word, joy of fabulation. Not limited by a consensual "reality", what we more or less agree upon as the contours of the experiential world, the fabulator makes stories that are unabashedly fabulous. The analogues and precursors of the fabulators are not the dogged chronicles of the visible world or the patient masters of the inner life but Rabelais, the Chaucer of the fabliaux, the Arabian Nights, the Brothers Grimm, the early masters of the eighteenth century (139).

The Quartet is rich in fabulation and its corollary aspects, which include elements of mysticism and magic, black humor, campiness, and what Ihab Hassan in his analysis of postmodernism terms "radical irony and primitivism" (57). Durrell's various characters revel in story-telling, and the stories are inevitably bizarre or grotesque, qualities that are augmented by their casual alignment with the everyday and mundane incidents of life in wartime Alexandria. For example, in Justine Darley relates the following story:

> Only last week Pombal came home with the story of the Swedish vice-consul whose car had broken down on the Matrugh road. He had left his wife alone in it while he

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> walked to the nearest telephone point in order to ring up the consulate and ask them to send out another car. He arrived back to find her body sitting normally on the back seat — without a head. Police were summoned and the whole area was combed. Some Bedouin encamped nearby were among those interrogated. While they were busy denying knowledge of the accident, out of the apron of one of the women rolled the missing head. Thay had been trying to extract the gold teeth which had been such an unpleasant feature of her party smile (125-126).

There are stories within stories within stories, as when Darley tells a story about Justine telling stories to a group of child prostitutes in an Alexandrian brothel, or when he relates another about Scobie telling a story about his parents' gruesome death:

> 'My father was an early pioneer of motoring, old man. Early road races flat out at twenty miles an hour all that sort of thing. He and his own landau... My mother sat beside him, old man. Never left his side, not even for road races. She used to act as his mechanic. The newspapers always had pictures of them at the start, sitting up there in bee-keepers veils — God knows why the pioneers always wore those veils. Dust, I suppose' (Justine 129).

Darley takes over as narrator, thus shifting the story to another plane of the word-continuum:

> The veils had proved their undoing. Rounding a hair-pin in the old London-Brighton road-race his father's veil had been sucked into the front axle of the car they were driving. He had been dragged into the road, while his companion had careened on to smash headlong into a tree.The only consolation is that that is just how they would have liked to go out. They were leading by a quarter of a mile' (Justine 129).

The peculiar mixture of humor with truly grotesque images of death functions throughout the Quartet to underscore the essence of life in the relativistic universe, what Pursewarden calls the "pointless Joke" of existence. Even Darley, the metaphorical modernist in search of postmodernist assimilation, thinks: "I have always been very fond of ludicrous deaths and had great difficulty containing my laughter as Scobie described this misadventure to me with portentous rotations of his glass eye" (Justine 129). In fact, almost every character in the Quartet has a story to tell, and the contents of these stories usually center around death, mutilation, or sexual perversity. Apart from the

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literary functions they may serve (such as to provide oblique insight into the psychology of the tale-teller, or to provide information about another character) they are primarily tales told for the pleasure, and sometimes the irony, they contain. They are also told as frequently for the entertainment of the other characters in the Quartet as they are for the reader. Fabulation contributes to solidification of Durrell's use of relativity in that it enhances the dense textuality of the tetralogy. In addition, the strange nature of these stories illuminates the richness of multiple perspectives in the Alexandrian micro-cosmos, a factor suggestive of a "reality" – perhaps many "realities" – beyond that of immediate experience.

The relish with which the characters tell their stories is tempered by a considerable degree of objectivity, so that even the most bizarre or gruesome description retains a tone of unreality, and at times, even mundanity, that is itself disturbing. Consequently, the equilibrium of the reader's perspective is turned on its ear; right and wrong, cruelty and kindness, love and hate, all become interchangeable and equivocal forces. Darley encapsulates this phenomenon by observing: "If two or more explanations of a single human action are as good as each other then what does action mean but an illusion — a gesture made against the misty backcloth of a reality made palpable by the delusive nature of human division merely?" (Clea 167). The literary disorientation resulting from this philosophy is the perfect atmosphere for the symbiotic co-existence of fabulation and narrative realism; a relationship that John Barth includes in his discussion of the "ideal postmodern novel", which should "somehow rise above the quarrel between realism and irrealism" (203). In the strange, fragmented world of Durrell's Alexandria, even events that are real seem tinged with grotesqueness by virtue of their proximity to the more ludicrous or fantastical elements. For instance, Darley records one of Justine's diary entries, where she in turn relates a scenario from her childhood:

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> A camel has collapsed from exhaustion in the street outside the house. It is too heavy to transport to the slaughter-house so a couple of men come with axes and cut it up then and there in the open street, alive. They hack through the white flesh — the poor creature looking ever more pained, more aristocratic, more puzzled as its legs are hacked off. Finally there is the head still alive, eyes open, looking around. The animal submits like a palm tree. But for days afterwards the street is soaked in its blood and our bare feet are printed by its moisture (Justine 56).

Indirectly, Durrell, via the ever-vigilant Pursewarden, reveals his preoccupation with fabulation in the cynical writer's following commentary:

> He dwelt mostly upon the Faits Divers — those little oddities of human conduct which mirrored the true estate of man, which lived on behind the wordier abstraction, pleading for the comic and miraculous in lives made insensitive by drabness, by the authority of bald reason. Beside a banner headline which he would have to interpret in a draft dispatch to Mountolive the next day — ARAB UNION APPEALS AGAIN — he could find the enduring human frailties in GREAT RELIGIOUS LEADER TRAPPED IN LIFT or LUNATIC BREAKS MONTE CARLO BANK which reflected the macabre unreason of fate and circumstance (Mountolive 147).

Textual richness and density are the by-products of the characters' many-leveled stories, their oddities,and their distinctive perspectives on the realities of life in Alexandria. Through them Durrell combines the most peculiar, horrifying, often outrageous stories with more "traditional" narrative content, such as the story of Capodistria's father, who when he was alive slept with a blow-up doll and frequently took her out to dinner. The story becames more bizarre as it becomes more embellished, as we discover that the senior Capodistria invested thousands of pounds in a complete wardrobe and jewels for his mannequin mistress. The anecdote can certainly stand on its own, in a "universe" of its own: however, in the layered, prismatic, often achronological world of the Quartet, it contributes to a more defined picture of the motivations and history driving Capodistria's own promiscuous life.

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Other features of the Quartet demonstrate Durrell's interest in a return to fabulation. Among them are the significance given to symbols and philosophies of an occult nature, including astrology, tarot cards, cabalistic hermeticism, and the stranger fine points of Eastern mysticism. Clea, for example, casts her horoscope before making any major decision, Justine reads Tarot cards, and Nessim literally consults the stars through the high-powered telescope in his observatory. Furthermore, the main characters have symbolic names — Darley's initials are the same as Durrell's; Clea Montis, whose name suggests the Greek goddess Aphrodite; Melissa Artemis; Balthazar, the mystic wise man; Mountolive, as his name suggests, is a professional peace-keeper; Maskelyne, the chief war officer who, as his name suggests, is a paragon of British military masculinity; and of course Pursewarden, who is named for a card in the Tarot deck, The Fool. The Fool embodies brilliance, noble aspirations, and the power of cosmic energy. On the card he is depicted as a tall, blond, thin man carrying a wand over his shoulder, at the end of which a purse is fastened. The purse is locked, and the lock is an eye; within the purse is all human experience. Pursewarden not only resembles The Fool physically, he also acts in the Quartet as the custodian of what Darley calls "the whole pointless Joke," and Durrell calls "the universal human anecdote."

Other symbolic characters include John Keats, the handsome blond haired, blue-eyed Global Agency reporter who enters the story in Justine as an insecure, restless, and easily upset correspondent in Alexandria. His maturity is finally reached in Clea after a series of sobering wartime assignments in the desert. He dispenses creative advice to Darley:

> Truth is double-bladed, you see. There is no way to express it in terms of language, this strange bifurcated medium with its basic duality! Language! What is a writer's struggle except a struggle to use a medium as precisely as possible, but knowing fully its basic imprecision? A hopeless task, but nonetheless rewarding for being hopeless. Because

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> the task itself, the act of wrestling with an insoluble problem, grows the writer up! (Clea 175).

All of the disparate elements related to fabulation, as developed by postmodernists in general and utilized by Durrell in the Quartet, are newly discovered in light of relativity theory, which blurs the line between subject and object so that we are no longer able to say with certainty that anything is objectively real. Absolutes dissolve, and the observer or reader mingles with the thing observed, or read. In such an environment stories that are absurd, grotesque, mystical or purely symbolic, are as "real" and "true" as stories that are realist or formalist. As a result, the real and fantastic elements of fiction mingle and at times become indistinguishable, creating an enormous Present which is, as Durrell says, "the impact of all time crowded into one moment of time" (111).

Moreover, the bizarre aspects of Durrell's fabulation invite the reader (read observer) into complicity with the author's, and the characters', outrageous story-telling (the object observed). In a multi-dimensional, relativistic universe the absurd and unlikely are given legitimacy. Acknowledging the multifaceted and distorted nature of reality in a universe which offers no absolute observation post, Darley ponders Arnauti's assertion that: "For the writer people as psychologies are finished. The contemporary psyche has exploded like a soap-bubble under the investigations of the mystagogues." (Justine 113). Postmodernism, like the relatibity upon which it is predicated , suggests that traditional character analysis is only a partial truth, and that new techniques are necessary for telling new truths about a universe without fixed points of reference.

The last important element to consider is Durrell's treatment of sexuality in the Quartet, since although he claims that the four volumes constitute "an exploration of modern love," there are

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distinctive values inherent in the post-Einsteinian love relationships of a relativistic universe that differentiate them from modernistic or pre-Einsteinian concepts of sexuality.

The first is the concept of ego diffusion, or, more precisely, patterns of group egoism. Carl Bode discusses Durrell's lack of ethics in the Quartet, which he says creates a "magnificent amorality" among the characters. This is indeed a distinctive quality in the relationships sketched by Durrell; relationships which, moreover, seem as random and ephemeral as the movements of subatomic particles in the statistical energy fields of quantum mechanics.

Darley is the Quartet's sexual "observer." He documents many of the other characters' relationships, and clearly he is the primary "explorer" in the "exploration of modern love." Despite simultaneous and intense affairs with the darkly mysterious Justine and the fragile, golden-haired prostitute, Melissa, with whom he comes closest to being in love, Darley remains analytical and detached about love. At one point he dons a tarbush and wanders through the old quarter of the city, watches a couple having sex (in a brothel), and afterwards writes: " I want to know what it really means." (Justine 185) When Melissa eventually succombs to tuberculosis Darley refers to her face in death as "the last term in a series" (Justine 238). Later, in Clea, he muses on the effect Melissa's death has had on him in the self-conscious manner typical of Postmodernism:

> It was as if she had never existed, never inspired in me the pain and pity which ... would live on, transmuted into other forms, perhaps --but live triumphantly on forever. I had worn her out like an old pair of socks, and the utterness of this disappearance surprised and shocked me. Could "love" simply wear out like this? ... Was she simply a nexus of literary cross-references scribbled in the margins of a minor poem? And had my love dissolved her in this strange fashion, or was it simply the literature I had tried to make out of her? Words, the acid-bath of words! ... Melissa had simply been one of the many costumes of love! (Clea 33-34).

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Justine is yet another of the "costumes of love," and although she exudes a powerful aura of sexuality, it is Pursewarden, her most cynical lover, who calls her "a tiresome old sexual turnstyle through which presumably we all must pass " (Balthazar 115). This in fact seems to be true; even Clea has a brief lesbian affair with Justine. In her avid self-indulgence Justine symbolizes the ultimate narcississtic lover motivated more by external factors than internal passions. It is political passion, for instance, that galvanizes her marriage to Nessim Hosnani, and she observes:

> This was a Faustian compact he was offering her. There was something more surprising: for the first time she felt desire stir within her, in the loins of that discarded, preempted body which she regarded only as a pleasure-seeker, a mirror-reference to reality. There came over her an unexpected lust to sleep with him — no, with his plans, his dreams, his obsessions, his money, his death! ... She felt suddenly as if her feelings had become caught up in some great cobweb, imprisoned by laws which lay beneath the level of her conscious will, her desires, the self-destructive flux and reflux of her human personality (Mountolive 181).

Justine, like Melissa, has many faces, but Durrell doesn't integrate them, and so her ego remains diffuse. Her personality is elusive and seemingly fragmentary: "A walking abstract of the writers and thinkers whom she had loved or admired" (Justine 203). Darley, Nessim, Justine, and Melissa are linked in an odd arrangement of sexual camaraderie; Melissa loves Darley, who loves first Melissa and then Justine, who "loves" first Nessim and then Darley; finally, Nessim initiates an affair with Melissa, closing the circle of interrelatedness between the four. Of course Darley analyzes and evaluates the motivations underlying the quadrangle:

> Nessim, in beginning to explore and love Melissa as an extension of Justine, delineated perfectly the human situation. Melissa would hunt in him for the qualities which she imagined I must have found in his wife. The four of us were unrecognized complementaries of one another, intricately bound together (Justine 165).

Later we discover that Clea has had affairs with both Justine and, later in the Quartet, with Darley. Paradoxically, it is through her lesbian experience that she comes to fully understand that she is a

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woman made for men, and she confirms this realization through her affair with Darley. Ultimately, she elects to be alone and leaves Darley and the others to find solitude in which to paint. She writes to Darley: "I wait, quite serene and happy, a real human being, an artist at last" (Clea 275). Of all Durrell's Alexandrian "lovers" Clea is the most eclectic and spontaneous. She represents, among other things, the Dionysian ethos frequently found in postmodern fiction. It is interesting that she ultimately devotes her gifts to abstract painting, in light of the abstract quality of her various relationships, which in turn coincides with her inherent hedonistic tendencies. Early on she writes to Darley: "I suppose events are simply a sort of annotation of our feelings — one might be deduced from the other. Time carries us (boldly imagining that we are discreet egos modelling our own personal futures) — time carries us forward by the momentum of those feelings inside of us of which we ourselves are least conscious" (Justine 192).

Love in postmodern fiction is, according to Ihab Hassan, alternately primitive (exemplified by Darley's witnessing the sex act in the brothel, or Justine's visit to the child brothel), spontaneous (like the random collisions between subatomic particles in the quantum world), represented by self-consuming play and camp or comic pornography.

The latter two qualities are articulated in the Quartet through the tragicomic antics of the many sexual deviates and polymorphously perverse characters used by Durrell as foils for the more mainstream, albeit ephemeral and superficial, relationships of the main characters. In the cases of Balthazar, Scobie and Toto de Brunel, the end results of their self-consuming play are both tragic and literal. At a carnival ball Toto, disguised in a domino and wearing Justine's ring at her request, is killed by Nessim's brutish brother Narouz, who thinks he has stabbed Justine for making sexual advances toward him. In "truth" Toto makes the pass at Narouz on his own account and for his

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own gratification, using Justine's ring to attract Narouz' attention, and is murdered for his trouble. Scobie is murdered by a group of sailors he tries to entice while cruising the docks of Alexandria dressed in full transvestite regalia. Balthazar literally tries to consume himself by attempting suicide after a broken love affair with a Greek actor. It should be noted that Durrell's treatment of his homosexual and lesbian characters is casual and free of any judgmental overtones, in keeping with the objectivity requisite for tale-telling in a relativistic cosmos. There are instances where comedy serves as potent commentary on the frailties and liabilities of certain lifestyles. One example occurs when we learn that the outrageously perverse Scobie, homosexual, pedophillic, and transvestite in one incarnation, has been elevated in the ranks of Alexandria's secret police to a position in, of all things, the vice squad. The confusion and irony that follow from this promotion provide some of the most colorful, and tragic, passages in the Quartet.

Apart from the above-mentioned forms of sexuality, there is a story of incest; Pursewarden and his blind sister Liza, it is revealed, have been lovers for many years prior to Pursewarden's arrival in Alexandria. Liza tells Darley the details, entreating him to write a compassionate biography of her dead brother, one omitting the nature and extent of her incestuous union with her brother.

At this point Liza reveals that Pursewarden has a wife who is intent upon telling her version of the "truth" about her husband's sordid obsession. It is also apparent that Liza knows the "true" reason for her brother's suicide:

> He could not free himself from my inside hold on him, though he tried and struggled. I could not free myself from him, though truthfully I never wished to until ... until the day arrived which he had predicted so many years before when the man he always called 'the dark stranger' arrived ... It was David Mountolive ... my brother knew it quite unerringly and wrote after a long silence asking me if the stranger had come. When he got my letter he seemed suddenly to realize that our relationship might be endangered or crushed in the way he

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had been with his wife — not by anything we did, no, but by the simple fact of my existence. So he committed suicide (Clea161).

Liza goes on to quote from one of her letters from Pursewarden in which he explains his reason for freeing her from "the chains in which I have so cruelly held you all these years" (Clea 162). He concludes by writing:

> "I must really abandon you, really remove myself from the scene in a manner which would permit no further equivocation in our vacillating hearts. Yes, I had anticipated the joy, but not that it would bring with it such a clear representation of certain death. This was a huge novelty! Yet it is the completest gift that I can offer you as a wedding present! And if you look beyond the immediate pain you will see how perfect the logic of love is to one who is ready to die for it " (Clea 162).

Liza shows Darley a worn photograph of a young girl, hers and Pursewarden's, who died many years earlier. It was then, says Liza, that he was overcome with remorse for a situation which "had brought us nothing but joy before. Her death suddenly made him guilty. Our relationship foundered there." (Clea 165). Liza's story and point of view radically change all previous interpretations of the complex Pursewarden persona developed within the first three volumes of the Quartet. The complacently deviant and ultimately tragic Pursewarden of Liza's perception contrasts sharply with the defiant and mocking cynic who writes such odd verses as:

> Nature he loved, and next to nature nudes,
> He strove with every woman worth the strife,
> Warming both cheeks before the fire of life,
> And fell, doing battle with a million prudes. (Clea 127).

Durrell's "exploration of modern love" encompasses love in many forms, spread across the ambiguous, often indifferent, tapestry of a word continuum. Despite the passionate words of the various characters, the fragmented structure, multiple points of view and the ephemeral, ever-changing quality of their relationships counteract the psychological intensity of their declarations,

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lending a distinctly bloodless overtone to love and sexuality in the Quartet. This effect is heightened by the analytical descriptions and explanations of love provided primarily by Darley and Pursewarden. The terminology is usually scientific, reminding the reader that Durrell's treatment of love is relativistic only in the Einsteinian sense of the word; for instance, Darley observes:

> I ... saw that lover and loved, observer and observed, throw down a field about each other ... They then infer the properties of their love, judging it from this narrow field with its huge margins of unknown ("the refraction"), and proceed to refer it to a generalized conception of something constant in its qualities and universal in its operation. How valuable a lesson this was, to art and to life! (Clea 47).

Justine also has her thoughts about the definition of love in the relativistic universe, and her observations contribute to Darley's, expanding the Quartet's context for love and sexuality. In Justine's diary Darley reads:

> ... it is a simultaneous firing of two spirits engaged in the autonomous act of growing up. And the sensation is of something having noiselessly exploded inside each of them. Around this event, dazed and preoccupied, the lover moves examining his or her experience; her gratitude alone, stretching away toward a mistaken donor, creates the illusion that she communicates with her fellow, but this is false. The loved object is simply one that has shared an experience at the same moment in time, narcissistically; and the desire to be near the beloved object is at first due not to the idea of possessing it, but simply to let the two experiences compare themselves, like reflections in different mirrors (Justine 46).

The nod toward sexual narcissism is not surprising in lieu of the random and promiscuous qualities of the characters' interactions, as well as their tendency to "love" what their lovers represent rather than who they are. Justine loves Nessim for his money and his political passions, while Nessim loves Justine because she is politically useful to him. Darley's "love" for Melissa is based on a dry sort of passion that represents a diminished form of real love. Darley records:

> Their embraces were like the dry conjunction of waxworks, of figures modelled in gesso for some classical tomb. Her hands moved charmlessly now upon the barrel-vaulting of his ribs, his loins, his throat, his cheek; her fingers pressing here and there

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> in the darkness, fingers of the blind seeking a secret panel in a wall, a forgotten switch which would slide back, illuminate another world, out of time. It was useless it seemed (Mountolive 154).

The last word, however, belongs emphatically to Pursewarden who, as usual, gives voice to Durrell's ideology regarding significant issues in the Quartet. In extracts from his notebook, entitled My Conversations With Brother Ass, he speaks eloquently to the question of love as he conceives of it, predicting that someday

> The great schools of love will arise, and sensual and intellectual knowledge will draw their impetus from each other. The human animal will be uncaged, all his dirty coprolitic refuse of belief cleaned out. And the human spirit, radiating light and laughter, will softly tread the green grass like a dancer; will emerge to cohabit with the time forms and give children to the world of the elementaries — undines and salamanders, sylphs and sylvestres, Gnomi and Vulcani, angels and gnomes.
>
> Yes, to extend the range of physical sensuality to embrace mathematics and theology: to nourish not to stunt the intuitions. For culture means sex, the root knowledge, and where the faculty is derailed or crippled, its derivatives like religion come up dwarfed or contorted — instead of the emblematic mystic rose you get Judaic cauliflowers like Mormons or Vegetarians, instead of artists you get cry-babies, instead of philosophy, semantics.
>
> The sexual and creative energies go hand in hand. They convert into one another — the solar sexual and the linear spiritual holding an external dialogue. They ride the spiral of time together. They embrace the whole of the human motive. The truth is only to be found in our own entrails — the Truth of time. "Copulation is the lyric of the mob!" Aye, and also the university of the soul: but a university at present without endowments, without books or even students. No, there are a few (Clea 131-132).

Love, both in a relativistic universe and in the postmodern context of the Quartet, is not static; rather, it is simply one of an infinite number of variables in the space-time continuum. Pursewarden concludes at the end of Clea : "The richest love is that which submits to the arbitration of Time" (250). Darley, too, eventually rejects the linear, traditional notion of love, claiming not to "wish to coerce anyone, to make promises, to think of life in terms of compacts, resolutions, covenants" (Justine 195).

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Using relativity vis a vis elements of love and sexuality in the Quartet, Durrell is more tangential than correlative. The many interrelated "rave" stories are spun out within the context of a literary construct derived from relativity theory, but are not specifically Einsteinian in and of themselves. The most significant effect of relativity on the characters' relationships is that freed from the constraints of time and space — that is, space defined as the presence of a single viewpoint — the definition of love is expanded and liberalized under the effect of objective individual "truths".

Relativity theory is the key factor in identifying the postmodernist elements in the Quartet; by attempting to write a work of fiction based on relativistic concepts, Durrell produces many of the features found in postmodernist novels: the City as Cosmos, fragmented narrative, persistent self-reflexiveness, deviant sexuality, multiplicitous points of reference, fabulation, supernaturalism, black humor, a post-existential ethos, and a return to the picaresque. Reality is continually revised and redefined, and there is a certain level of preoccupation with the problematics of the book as artifact (Arnauti's Moeurs, for example, Pursewarden's notebooks and novels, Justine's diary and, of course, Darley's struggle to render a "true" or "real" version of the stories of the Alexandrians.) The concept of time is altered according to the specific tale being told and the relative position of the tale-teller in space-time; in all instances past, present and future become interchangeable. For the reader the extensive commentaries from Pursewarden's notebooks quoted by Darley in Clea occur in the "present" instant of time, the "now," even though they belong to the past in terms of a linear time system, which, of course, Einstein affirmed does not exist. Linear time is a universally accepted human construct; in the Quartet Durrell attempts to create fiction freed from the restrictions of traditional time. The same motive underlies his extensive and detailed descriptions of dream sequences which, although demonstrative of Durrell's debt to Freudian dream theory, are more

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significant for the fact that they illuminate his characters — particularly Nessim, whose dreams on the verge of madness are extraordinary phantasmogoric pageants — and illustrate the manipulation of space-time in the context of a word continuum. Furthermore, as Carl Bode points out, "dreams are a notable example of things more spatial than temporal. They too blur the line between subject and object, between present and past — and future." (219) Supernaturalism and occultism serve a similar function because they refer to a distant realm that is distinct from, but continuous with, perceived "reality."

Ultimately, Durrell's use of relativity in the Quartet produces fiction that, although indebted in some respects to its modernist predecessors, is more allied with the postmodernist canon. As such the Quartet is a bridge between the modernist and postmodernist schools, containing elements of both but belonging purely to neither . Relativity tips the balance in favor of postmodernism, however. The Quartet exemplifies John Barth's definition of a postmodern novel:

> A worthy program for postmodern fiction ... is the synthesis or transcension of ... antithesis which may be summed up as premodernist and modernist modes of writing. My ideal postmodernist author neither repudiates nor merely imitates either his twentieth century modernist parents or his nineteenth century premodernist grandparents. He has the first half of our century under his belt, but not on his back ... he aspires to a fiction more democratic in its appeal than such late late-modernist marvels (in my definition) as Beckett's Texts For Nothing or Nabokov's Pale Fire. He may not hope to reach and move the devotees of Michener and Irving Wallace — not to mention the great mass of television addicted non-readers. But he should hope to reach and delight ... beyond the circle of what Mann used to call the Early Christians: professional devotees of high art (203).

In attempting to construct a quantum novel Durrell utilizes the pluralistic context of postmodernism to best advantage, although this was probably not his express intention when writing the Quartet. Nonetheless, it is possible to include him (at least in terms of the Quartet) in the small group of writers who have worked out of the modernist tradition but are futurist, that is,

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forward-oriented, with regard to canon. Like most postmodernist fiction, the Quartet is experimentalist in its essence, and the structuring principle of relativity allows it to be so.

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CHAPTER IV Conclusion: "The Heraldic Universe": Durrell's Position As a Postmodern Scientific Relativist

How much did Durrell know of actual relativity? How successful is Durrell in his literary assimilation of relativity theory, and to what degree? The answer lies in understanding the extent of his knowledge of Einstein's ideas, and his awareness of the limits in grafting them onto a literary form. In an interview he had this to say about the matter:

> You are uncomfortable about relativity? But my paper construct is only a toy, a shape, like a kaleidoscope made for the child of a friend. I hoped by this to restore action to the novel, for since Proust the novelist has become a ruminant where he isn't a mere pictographer. Stereoscopic narrative, stereophonic personality. It was just an idea. If you remember scenes or characters and can't quite remember which book they come in, it proves that the four are one work tightly woven, doesn't it? The joiner is the reader, the continuum is his private property. One dimension is in the light of the other (163).

Despite this apparently flippant assessment of literary relativity, Durrell nevertheless had seriously considered many of Einstein's ideas prior to beginning the Quartet, and he revealed his concern in A Key To Modern British Poetry: "As far as we are concerned only two aspects of relativity concern us: its attitude to time, and its attitude to subject-object relationship" (28). Moreover, he was well aware of the lack of faith physicists had in those who sought to translate their theories into layman's terms, and as I have already pointed out, Einstein counted himself among their number. In answer to the claim that relativity is a purely mathematical construct and can only be truly understood by mathematicians and theoretical physicists, Durrell says:

> At some point the cosmologist must pronounce upon the real world, for the benefit of the people living in it who want to understand it better, and who want to learn to live in it more successfully. It is useless doing what the physicist has done — which is to leave us all embedded, so to speak, in Euclidean space and time, while his own

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> imagination is busy with the new realm. I do not see why lack of mathematical ability should prevent us from discovering what he is thinking (my emphasis) (32).

Durrell points out that although several scientists have tried to present relativity in a language understandable to all readers, none, in his opinion, have been successful. Of course, since Durrell wrote the Key there have indeed been many popularized explanations of Einstein's work, including a few by Einstein himself, written toward the end of his life. Many of these versions are well written and easily understood with a bit of patience and persistence. However, they are not literary in style or intention, in the traditional sense. Durrell does mention one source, Samuel Alexander's Space, Time and Deity, whose "attempt to link up space-time with Deity is interesting because it shows the way the wind is blowing" (1952, 32).Alexander's premise is that space-time is the primordial basis of all reality and that, contrary to previous belief, space-time is not a creation of the human mind alone.

The mysticism that finds such a strong voice in the Quartet is also related to relativity, for as Durrell says: "It is worth pointing out that these Eastern religions, whether Indian or Chinese, offer us one or two ideas which are not completely incompatible with some of the propositions of relativity. They claim to side-track causality." (1952, 33). This in fact is seen to be the case; few Indian or Chinese theosophers would be surprised at the revelations of Einstein, since their belief systems support the notion of observer-dependent reality. "Nirvana" is a condition devoid of time and not subject to intellectual or linguistic interpretations or representations.

Durrell read many of Einstein's writings, and although he knew very little if anything about the mathematical equations through which the theory is articulated, he believed that imagery and metaphors could be used in literature to express what mathematics expressed in physics. To

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illuminate this idea he uses the example of the Renaissance philosopher, Giordano Bruno, who resembles Einstein in that he overthrew the Aristotelian way of looking at the universe, and through language and imagery presented a world view that in many places closely resembles relativity. In doing so, says Durrell, he was "better able to give us a picture of the simultaneity ... of time, than a mathematician would be: secondly, we know how much Joyce was influenced by the ideas of Bruno at the time he was composing Finnegans Wake " (35). He adds: "I dare not claim that [Bruno's] system squares with relativity at all points. I do not know enough about it to suggest that" (1952, 35).

More important, Durrell believes that relativity's reorientation of man in relation to time and space in the universe has resulted in a concomitant reorientation of the elements constituting linguistic structure. This is a natural outcome of language's dependence on the concept of time. Change one concept, and the others must of necessity be altered:

> The relation of subject, verb and object in the simple sentence has been disturbed, no less than the relation of the sentence to the paragraph and the paragraph to the book. Before this new idea grew up language was, so to speak, Aristotelian in structure: now it is trying to render a sort of immediacy of impact — the impact of all time crowded into one moment of time (34).

In Durrell's preoccupation with Einsteinian time, he does not overstate the significance of relativity's alterations of the definition of time. Time as process no longer presents a "true" picture of reality, and every form of human endeavor is subject to time in one way or another. For example, Durrell says

> ... if you change our ideas about time you cannot help but change our ideas about death also. It is one of the paradoxes of the new space-time that, if time is really spread out in this way, we can just as easily situate death in the present as in the future (Durrell's emphasis) (1952, 36).

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Representing this idea linguistically is virtually impossible, he admits, yet the writer will refashion and transform it into what he calls a "weapon capable of rendering immediacy" (1952, 36). In the Quartet Pursewarden's suicide is an example of how Durrell attempts to capture the essence of death in space-time. We "hear" of his death long before it actually occurs in the narrative, and even then he is not allowed to rest. Pursewarden's notebooks are discovered, and once more it is as if he is alive. His aphorisms are thought of and quoted continually throughout the four volumes by all of the major characters. Clea remarks that it seems barely possible that he is gone. Speaking of Pursewarden's book, Select Prayers For English Intellectuals, the young journalist John Keats is led to observe that "the dead are overwhelming us with kindnesses all the time" (Clea 178). Darley, responding to Clea's remark, says, "The dead are everywhere. They cannot be so simply evaded" (Clea 222). Because time is so thoroughly disrupted throughout the Quartet, the suicide becomes lost in the recurring reminiscences, retrieved notes, and re-enactments of Pursewardian scenarios perpetrated by the other characters. The actual time of the act becomes irrelevant in and of itself because in a real sense Pursewarden continues to live in as "real" a way as any of the other personalities of the Quartet who are "in fact" alive.

Durrell claims that his relativistic view of literary construction is shared by Proust, Joyce, Rilke, and T.S. Eliot, although they are far less deliberate in their use of the theory, if in fact there is any intentional relationship at all. The connection lies not so much in the original source of the material, but in the ultimate result which, in Durrell's opinion, can be likened to literature based on relativity theory, particularly in terms of the ways in which time is addressed. He says:

> Before Joyce the novel was constructed so to speak lengthways, as was the average poem. The new consciousness of the new century with its emphasis on time produced

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> other criteria. The naturalistic school, as André Gide points out in his Les Faux Monneyeurs, spoke about a slice of life (1952, 26).

There are elements of Einsteinian space-time in the stream of consciousness novel, to be sure, but Durrell perhaps overestimates the impact of the new physics on these literary artists, despite the undeniable relativistic undertones. Joyce's fiction, however, lends itself more readily to Freudian analysis than Einsteinian, as does Proust's. Rilke contemplates the nature of time in the following manner:

> We, of this earth and this to-day, are not for a moment hedged in by the world of time, nor bound within it: we are incessantly flowing over and over to those who preceded us and those who apparently come after us. In that widest 'open' world, all are — one cannot say 'simultaneously', for the very falling away of time conditions their existing ... (1925)

Durrell cites Rilke's comments about the Duinese Elagies, and there are echoes of relativity when he says,

> "Death is the side of life that is turned away from us: we must try to achieve the fullest consciousness of our existence, which is the same in the two unseparated realms, inexhaustibly nourished by both. There is neither a here nor a beyond but the great unity, in which those creatures who surpass us, the angels, are at home" (38).

T.S. Eliot was well versed in the philosophy and implications of relativity, mainly because of the time he spent with Bertrand Russell. However, unlike Durrell he was pessimistic about the assimilation of relativity in literature, and lamented the advent of the new physics, with its seemingly anarchical cosmological view. Although, as Durrell reveals, Eliot makes ample references to relativistic ideas in his poetry — especially in Four Quartets — they are references meant to reveal the dismal picture painted by the new science, and cannot be interpreted as a welcoming embrace for Einsteinian space-time. In his obvious discontent with the encroachment of the new physics, and the toppling of the old order of time and space — and therefore history — Eliot is in fact using the

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imagery and metaphors of relativity to disparage — or at least protest against — it. In "Burnt Norton" he says:

> Time past and time future
> Allow but a little consciousness.
> To be conscious is not to be in time.
> But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,
> The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,
> The moment in the draughty church at smokefall
> Be remembered; involved with past and future.
> Only through time time is conquered.
> (Four Quartets 16)

Durrell concludes the discussion of those writers to whom a relationship with relativity can most easily be ascribed by saying:

> I do not think it is stretching a point too far to say that the work of Joyce and Proust, the poetry of Eliot and Rilke, is an attempt to present the material of human affairs in the form of poetic continuum, where the language no less than the objects observed are impregnated with the new time (1952, 31).

The distinction between the pre-Einsteinian concept of time, which essentially described a linear progression of moments stretching into "eternity," and post-Einsteinian space-time gave rise to a clear dividing line in literature between traditional "linear" narratives, and the non-linear, at times random, constructions of twentieth century fiction. Durrell realizes the significance of this distinction, yet is cognizant of the linkage between pre-Einsteinian and post-Einsteinian writers in terms of the influence of certain ideas pertaining to time, space, and the relationship between subject and object. In the Key he writes:

> I do not wish to suggest that any one discovery is responsible for any of the others. History is too tightly woven for us to proceed in this manner. Some of these so-called 'new ideas' are thousands of years old. If I suggest that the influence of Freud and Einstein is discernible in the intricate and beautiful workmanship of the modern poet I do not want you to regard it as purely a cause-and-effect study of literature. If you do then I shall be forced to point out that many of Freud's ideas were anticipated by

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> Neitzsche and Dostoievski, and that some of Einstein's equipment is as old as Pythagoras (1952, 38).

Durrell also believed that relativity bears a resemblance to Hegelian objective idealism, although clearly Einstein would not sanction the term "idealism" in reference to a theory that in fact destroys the comfortable notion of ordered reality in favor of non-linear, nonordered reality that is as much subjective (from the observer's perspective) as it is "objective" (from the object-point's perspective). To draw this sort of a parallel is to overstate the cross-references between theoretical physics and philosophy. Nevertheless, Durreel seems correct when he observes: "In place of the pragmatically and eternally true, science has placed a new, a more humble objective: provisional truth, as complete as possible, and as fully aware of the limitations of thought as possible" (34).

However, Durrell later extrapolates from Einstein's theories a further extension: "nothing has permanent value — that is really the message behind it — everything depends upon its context in a given system, depends on the way you use it. The identity of opposites precludes any complete and final judgement on reality" (1952, 37). This is not what Einstein's theory implies; what Durrell is talking about is a derivative popularized theory, relativism, which Einstein himself condemned as a misinterpretation of relativity. It is not that "nothing has permanent value," but rather that everything does.

Durrell professes a fascination with the disappearance of uniformity in nature, an idea derived from a popular interpretation of Heisenberg's indeterminacy principle, which advances the theory that we cannot observe the events of nature without changing it, and in consequence of our observation we have a metamorphosing effect upon nature, specifically at the sub-atomic level of

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behavior. Realizing how this idea runs counter to the strict determinism of the Victorians, Durrell writes:

> If reality is somehow extra-causal, then a whole new vista of ideas is opened up — a territory hitherto colonized only by intuition. If the result of every experiment, of every motion of nature, is completely unforeseen and unpredictable — then everything is perpetually brand new, everything is, if you care to think of it like that, a miracle (30).

* * *

> The world of science is like a nursery crowded with different toys. The scientist, sitting on the floor, tries to find some system which would satisfactorily explain their function. Finally, he decides upon a function that is common to all — they are for play. But it is extremely doubtful whether from such a collection of toys he will ever be able to deduce the existence of the child who collected them. The materialists thought one could. The modern scientist has so far lost confidence in his powers that he has given up trying. He is content with a provisional view instead of an absolute one (1952, 30, 27).

Durrell concludes this discussion by restating his intention to show the relationship between literary and physics-oriented thinking, and the change that language has undergone in order to accommodate significant developments in scientific enquiry, particularly theoretical physics. Pointing out that science and art are both ways of trying to construct "satisfying" pictures of reality, he reminds us:

> The important thing about these pictures is not their relative truth, but the joy they communicate. And our feeling for literature can only gain from an appreciation of the fact (45).

Later Durrell realized that he had explored the time factor in an early work, The Black Book, where, as he told Henry Miller, he planned "to destroy time." This theory, discussed at length in the Key, was in fact a combination of Einsteinian space-time and Bergsonian experiential time. In a conversation with Kenneth Young, Durrell said that his definition of relativistic time had been

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confused by reading Wyndham Lewis' Time and Western Man, which first attracted him to a consideration of the space-time continuum in literature. Recalls Durrell, "Indeed Bergson (under whom Proust studied) said he could not understand Einsteinian time and that the continuum was an enigma to him" (Unterecker, 19).

Durrell, however, proposes that complete understanding of relativity is not essential in its application to literature, maintaining instead that if his experiment — The Alexandria Quartet — is successful, then readers should be able to hold all four volumes in their heads and in so doing gain a sense of the continuum. The Quartet reflects the components of a continuum in its deliberately fragmented narrative, where characters and events are constantly revised, restructured, added to or subtracted from, and characters whom we are told are important are suddenly dispatched within a phrase or two soon after. There are streams of seemingly irrelevant facts which we are obliged to retrieve later in order to make sense of particular actions, which may or may not be developed. Casual observations by minor characters later turn out to provide vital information about other characters and events. In totality, the Quartet can be seen as an enormous jigsaw puzzle with an unlimited number of pieces, all necessary to formulate the complete "picture" yet at any given time missing one or several pieces, dependent upon where the observer stands to view the overall design, as well as which section is focused upon.

A continuum is never "complete" — by definition it cannot be — and so Durrell provides the enigmatic "Workpoints" at the end of both Justine and Balthazar, witholding them from Mountolive which, he claims, is meant to be an example of a "naturalistic" novel, and re-introducing them at the end of the final volume, Clea. In the Preface to The Alexandria Quartet Durrell explains that his rationale for concluding the four volumes with five workpoints is

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> only to suggest that even if a group of books were extended indefinitely, the result would never become roman-fleuve; if, that is to say, the axis of the work has been properly laid down it should be possible to radiate from it in any direction without losing the strictness and congruity of its relation to 'a continuum'.

As I have said, Durrell has been criticized for his freewheeling, and often inaccurate approach to the creation of quantum fiction but, as we have seen, he had no intention of translating the mathematical purity of relativity theory into linguistic symbols and images when he wrote the Quartet.

The volumes are difficult to assess in terms of whether they constitute a pure "word continuum" because the density of the prose and the wide range of their influences — from Freudian psychology to anthropology and philosophy — often obscure the distinctly relativistic features of the Quartet. Mountolive is purported to be a novel in the "naturalistic tradition," according to Durrell, yet there is never any indication as to why Durrell wrote only one of the four novels in this manner, nor how this departure relates to the overall design of the "word continuum" concept. In some respects it is different from Justine, Balthazar, and Clea ; for one thing, its subject, the young British diplomat David Mountolive, assumes the role of "observer" of the action from Darley, whose perspective dominates the other three novels. In Mountolive Darley recedes into the position of a minor character, while Mountolive's social circle becomes the focus, overlapping Darley's only marginally in that both he and Darley are close friends of Justine and Nessim Hosnani. The political soul of Alexandria is laid bare through Mountolive's growing awareness of the corruption, intrigues and plotting of the Alexandrian police, the unrelenting tedium of government and diplomatic business, as well as the painful discovery of Nessim's anti-British conspiracy.

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Inasmuch as everything has significance at some point in the Quartet (even seemingly unimportant details are frequently revealed to be crucial at later intervals) there are important sequences in Mountolive. We are given extensive and detailed information about the Coptic heritage and tumultuous political history of the wealthy Hosnani family, as a journey is taken into Mountolive's early days in Alexandria, with particular attention given to his brief but intense affair with the beautiful materfamilias of the Hosnanis, Leila. The deep affection between Mountolive and Nessim, Leila's eldest son, is also chronicled impressionistically, but in such a way that we are able to understand Mountolive's feelings of betrayal upon discovering Nessim's political machinations.

It is also in Mountolive that the "actual" suicide of Pursewarden occurs; that is, the event itself as opposed to one of the numerous retellings of the event. Of all the characters in the Quartet, Mountolive's account of the suicide is by far the most objective and detached, despite his initial shock at the act.

> Mountolive felt nothing except a mounting indignation that anyone in his mission could confer such annoyance by a public act so flagrant! No, this was silly. "It is stupid," he whispered to himself. But he could not help feeling that Pursewarden had been guilty of something. Damn it, it was inconsiderate and underbred — as well as being mysterious.
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> It was only a matter of moments before Mountolive recovered his demure official pose and reoriented himself to take a benign interest in the mills and their thumping machinery (Mountolive 163-164).

The suicide as portrayed in Mountolive functions as the central account of an event that radiates out in three directions through Justine, Balthazar, and Clea. Since there is no linearity in a continuum, it makes no difference where the initial imagistic impulse of an action occurs; it is just as valid coming in the second volume of the Quartet as the first, third or last. Given the experimental nature of the tetralogy, Durrell realized the necessity of having some form of unifying factor in a

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work of literature where firmly rooted perspectives and the traditional concept of time are not guideposts in the course of the narrative. Instead, Durrell uses Pursewarden's suicide, not as a backbone, but as the refrain in a very long, complex song. It is appropriate that the event takes place in the volume where the primary concern seems to be with presenting hard factual information about the socio-political climate that resonates in the characters' lives.

In addition, Mountolive is a novel concerned with the creation of environment, and spends a great deal of prose fleshing out a fairly objective sense of place, of which events are a function. In this sense, perhaps, Durrell is correct in calling Mountolive a naturalistic novel in the tradition of Edmund Wilson's definition, where: "you ... supply your characters with a specific environment and heredity and then watch their automatic reactions ..." (13).

Environment and heredity play a crucial role in Mountolive, for as David Mountolive observes:

> The Alexandrians themselves were strangers and exiles to the Egypt which existed below the glittering surface of their dreams, ringed by the hot deserts and fanned by the bleakness of a faith which renounced worldly pleasure: the Egypt of rags and sores, of beauty and desperation. Alexandria was still Europe — the capital of Asiatic Europe, if such a thing could exist. It would never be like Cairo, where his whole life had an Egyptian cast, where he spoke ample Arabic; here French, Italian and Greek dominated the scene. The ambience, the social manner, everything was different, was cast in a European mold where somehow the camels and palm trees and cloaked natives existed only as a brilliantly coloured frieze, a backcloth to a life divided in its origins (Mountolive 130).

Moreover, although he is immensely popular and beloved by his Alexandrian circle, in most respects Mountolive maintains a peculiar detachment, as a disinterested outsider whose passion for Alexandria is in reality a manifestation of his passion, first for Leila Hosnani, and later for Liza Pursewarden , the dead poet's blind sister-lover. He stands apart from the essence of Alexandrian

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life, remaining for the most part untouched by the violent emotional swells and intrigues that hallmark the other characters' lives. Consequently, he is freed to be an objective documentor of the "naturalistic" aspects of the Alexandrian microcosm, and speculate upon the strange lives of his friends. Of Justine and Nessim, who are bound only by a mutual passion for political subversion, he

> pondered deeply upon them during those long sleepless days and nights and for the first time he saw them, in the light of this new knowledge, as enigmas. They were puzzles now and even their private moral relationship haunted him with a sense of something he had never properly understood, never clearly evaluated.
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> But perhaps the clues he sought lay further back in the past — further than either he or Pursewarden could see from a vantage point in the present time (Mountolive 173).

He realizes that there are many missing pieces to their puzzle, "some of them critical for an understanding of their case" (173).

The "realism" of Mountolive reveals itself in the lushness of its prose. Mountolive plays the relativity game too, of course, but in this novel there is the distinct impression that this is not his primary function; rather, he is given the responsibility of delivering the greatest number of "scene stealing" commentaries, which would be less appropriate coming from the other characters, most of whom are less able to objectify their Alexandrian context because they are too subjectively rooted within it. Mountolive's role as environmental articulator allows Durrell the freedom to create the Alexandrian landscape in a lush, richly textured prose style that does indeed echo the naturalistic school. Through his eyes we descend into the very heart of the Alexandrian paradox: antiquity foiled by modernity. In one striking passage Mountolive describes:

> The quarter lying beyond the red lantern belt, populated by the small traders, money lenders, coffee speculators, ships' chandlers, smugglers; here in the open street one had the illusion of time spread out flat — like the skin of an ox; the map of time which one could read from one end to the other, filling it in with known points of reference. The world of Moslem time stretched back to Othello and beyond — cafes sweet with the

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> trilling of singing birds whose cages were full of mirrors to give them the illusion of company. The love songs of birds to companions they imagined — which were only reflections of themselves! How heartbreakingly they sang, these illustrations of human love! Here, too, in the ghastly breath of the naptha flares the old eunuchs sat at trictrac, smoking the long narghiles which at every drawn breath loosed a musical bubble of sound like a dove's sob; the walls of the old cafes were stained by the sweat from the tarbushes hanging on the pegs; their collections of narghiles were lined up in rows on a long rack, like muskets, for which each tobacco drinker brought his own cherished holder. Here too the diviners, cartomancers — or those who would deftly fill your palm with ink, and for half a piaster scry the secrets of your inmost life. Here the peddlers carried magic loads of variegated and dissimilar objects of vertu from the thistle-soft carpets of Shiraz and Baluchistan to the playing cards of the Marseilles tarot; incense of the Hejaz, green beads against the evil eye, combs, seeds, mirrors for birdcages, spices, amulets and paper fans — the list was endless; and each, of course, carried in his wallet — like a mediaeval pardoner — the fruit of the world's great pornographies in the form of handkerchiefs and postcards on which were depicted, in every one of its pitiful variations, the one act we human beings most dream of and fear. Mysterious, underground, the ever- flowing river of sex, trickling easily through the feeble dams set up by our fretful legislation and the typical self-reproaches of the unpleasure-loving ... the broad underground river flowing from Petronius to Frank Harris (Mountolive 261).

Critics almost unanimously praise the voluptuousness of Durrell's prose, even when unsure as to whether or not it is the appropriate vehicle for a relativistic word continuum. Gerald Sykes likens the density of Mountolive to the "anachronistic serenity" of nineteenth century naturalist landscape, except that here the landscape is urban, not rural or pastoral. Of the Quartet as a whole he writes:

> It is a rich "plum-pudding" style, almost as surcharged with metaphor and erudition as verse, yet able (for me at least) to breathe like prose. It has a brocaded texture and a fullness of rococo invention that any living novelist will find hard to match (151-152).

In the Key Durrell himself acknowledges his debt to the naturalists by oblique references to Gide's criticism of the distinctive slice of life approach to environment practiced by the naturalists (26). Landscape reflects the nature of external reality, however, and the essence of the external realm — and man's continuing efforts to reconcile this realm with the internal interpretations of the external

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cosmos — is part of the struggle to humanize relativity theory, and it is this struggle that Durrell attempts to portray symbolically and imagistically throughout the Quartet. We are always concerned most with the impressions that the reality of "felt" experiences make upon the interpreting consciousness, yet there can be no doubt that external reality not only exists, but has a coherence all its own. Mountolive demonstrates this idea most clearly.

Cecily Mackworth sees the landscape of Alexandria as being nearly a living entity, another character in the complex tale. As I have discussed earlier, the City as icon is an important symbol for postmodernist writers in much the same way that the Romantics extolled the virtues of country life, and the mythicism of pastoral life. The difference lies in the psycho-emotional connotation imbued in the contemporary cityscape; the City is a darkly-shaded entity, a place where decadence and moral degeneration are the first steps into the world of chaos. It is a site of personal alienation, despite the immensity of its population, and is capable of destroying the will as surely as the elements of Nature against which man continues to pit himself in the fiction of the naturalists. The City, like Nature, is indifferent to the existence of man, but unlike Nature the City absorbs the psychological, moral, social and political coloration of its inhabitants, thereby taking on their "being-ness."

Alexandria is such a city, and throughout the Quartet the consciousness of the city and the consciousness if its denizens become gradually merged. The characters frequently and self-consciously refer to the city; Justine reminds us that they "are the children of our landscape," and Darley writes: "So the city claimed me once again — the same city made somehow less poignant and less terrifying than it had been in the past by new displacements in time." As Mackworth indicates, despite Durrell's asssertion that his portrait of Alexandria is exact in likeness,

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> we glimpse uneasily beneath the photographic likeness an Alexandria inflated into the Sadean dream of the unleashed subconscious — everywhere and nowhere, the world with its polite lid off. At any rate, this particular landscape obviously provides a perfect culture in which the full "multiplicity" of the characters can develop, free from the restrictions that would be imposed by an Occidental society. Alexandria is not just a decor, but a living element of the story, and without Alexandria, the story of Justine and her friends could not have happened (29).

Darley talks about the city throwing down a gravitational field about the lives of its inhabitants, pulling them ever closer to its center over time, and calling them back through the power of its forces should they stray too far from its boundaries. Lionel Trilling observes that

> Alexandria, so far from being a stage, is itself the protagonist of the action, a being far more interesting than any of its inhabitants, having its own way and its own rights, its own life and its own secret will to which the life and the will of the individual are subordinate (1962, 60).

Psychology is yet another factor which tends to dilute the relativistic elements in the Quartet. Durrell incorporates an enormous amount of psychological rhetoric whose primary sources are Freud, Groddeck, and Sade. In the Key Durrell writes: "Time and ego are the two determinants of style for the twentieth century; if one grasps the ideas about them one has, I think, the key to much that has happened " (1952, 117). The complex machinery of the ego, while undoubtedly important in the Quartet if only because it determines perspective and intrepretation of space-time, is nevertheless not the main topic of discussion here, nor is there room to give it appropriate consideration. However, it is true that time — as both a construct of human psychology and as a manifestation of "reality" — is at the heart of the Quartet's psychological consciousness. There is in addition an attempt to transmit this consciousness to the reader, part of Durrell's interest in forging a continuum across the boundaries of the text and all it contains.

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If there is a psychological motive underlying some of his Quartet's context, then it is Durrell's desire to create a psychological continuum between the space-time of external reality as depicted in the four novels, and the internal space-time of the reader. Although this is consistent with effects achieved in the fiction of Proust, Joyce (who was not particularly concerned with the presence or response of the reader) or even Woolf, Durrell deliberately endeavors to merge the consciousness-potential between the reader and the events, environment and characters in the Quartet. This demonstrates a sensibility closer to the postmodern ethos. As Gass comments:

> The purpose of a literary work is to capture consciousness, and the consequent creation, in you, of an imagined sensibility, so that while you read you are that patient pool or a cataract of concepts which the author has constructed.
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> While listening to such symbols sounding, the blind perceive; thought seems to grow a body, and the will is at rest ... (33).

Indeed, Trilling is disquieted to discover that "all the novels, and the Quartet as a whole, stand in a peculiar negative relation to the will" (1962, 57). The wills of the characters, too, are not only at rest — none of them try to exert their own wills over the strangely pervasive force field of Alexandria the "City." Personality and place are parts of a cosmic whole; as Balthazar notes:

> I see all of us not as men and women any longer, identities swollen with their acts of forgetfulness, follies, and deceits — but as beings unconsciously made part of place, buried to the waist among the ruins of a single city, steeped in its values (Balthazar 225).

Durrell's portrait of Alexandria is indebted to his interest in the psychological explorations of Groddeck, from whom he quotes directly in the Key:

> I assume that man is animated by the It which directs what he does and what he goes through, and that the assertion "I live" only expresses a small and superficial part of the total experience "I am lived by the It" (124).

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Durrell equates Groddeck's linkage of mind and body with the accomplishment of Einstein linking the concepts of space and time in physics. The correlation between the two theories is tenuous at best; for one thing, Einstein dealt in a realm where the variables of space-time are not nearly as indefinable as the myriad tones and shades embodied in human psychology. What Groddeck's It concept does do, however, is allow for man's seemingly irrational thoughts and acts, particularly when they cannot be explained by the données of a given character. Furthermore, by symbolically designating the city of Alexandria as the It operating in the Quartet, Durrell's borrowings from Groddeck enable him to invest his sense of place with a greater sense of anthropomorphism, thereby augmenting the appearance of continuity between the city and its inhabitants. In addition, the internal components and external actions of various characters become infinitely explainable, regardless of the egocentric or deviant nature of their personalities; inasmuch as they are reprehensible in their behavior, they are also always victims of Alexandria, of the It. As Warren Friedman points out: " The It — or Alexandria — then becomes a kind of mortar which both fills the gaps and binds the disparate elements that the exigencies of story or emotion demand of the various characters" (182).

Durrell introduces Clea with a quotation from de Sade:

> The Primary and most beautiful of Nature's qualities is motion, which agitates her at all times, but this motion is simply the perpetual consequence of crimes, it is conserved by means of crimes alone.

Crimes abound in the Quartet, so much so that they seem at times to be the only strong motivators within the complex web of space-time spun out in several dimensions through the pages of the four novels. There is a definite preoccupation with the darker side of human psychology; there is one suicide, six murders (five premeditated and one staged), three deaths from "heartsickness," and an

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assortment of grotesque mutilations. Balthazar attempts suicide after a failed love affair with a young Greek actor; Scobie is murdered by a group of sailors while "cruising" in drag on Alexandria's docks; Nessim loses an eye during the war; Justine suffers a stroke; Leila's extraordinary beauty is cruelly obliterated by an attack of smallpox; Clea loses her hand during a diving accident where Balthazar accidentally fires a speargun into the water, pinning her to a rock. Darley rescues her, but in doing so must hack off her painting hand.

Durrell spares no details in recounting his cavalcade of horrors, nor do the characters seem at all disturbed by the carnage around them. There is a disturbing matter-of-factness about the casual acceptance of and, on occasion, even perpetration of cruel acts, the retelling of which are passed on with no sense of remorse. For example, during a chess game Balthazar tells the following story for the amusement of his opponent, Mountolive:

> Now, I hated Dimitri Randidi, though not his lovely daughter; but just to humiliate him (I was disguised as a gypsy woman at the Carnival ball), I told her fortune. Tomorrow, I said, she would have a life experience which she must on no account miss — a man sitting in the ruined tower at Taposiris. 'You will not speak,' I said, 'but walk straight into his arms, your eyes closed. His name begins with an L, his family name with a J.' I had already in fact thought of a particularly hideous young man with these initials, and he was across the road at the Cervonis' ball. Colourless eyelashes, a snout, sandy hair. I chuckled when she believed me. Having told her this prophesy... I went across the road and sought out L.J., telling him I had a message for him. I knew him to be superstitious. He did not recognize me. I told him of the part he should play. Malign, spiteful, I suppose. I only planned to annoy Randidi. And it all turned out as I had planned. For the lovely girl obeyed the gypsy and fell in love with the freckled toad with the red hair. A more unsuitable conjunction cannot be imagined. But that was the idea — to make Randidi hop! It did, yes, very much and I was very pleased with my cleverness. He of course forbade the marriage. The lovers — which I invented, my lovers — were separated. Then Gaby Randidi, the beautiful girl, took poison. You can imagine how clever I felt. This broke her father's health and the neurasthenia ... overwhelmed him at least. Last autumn he was found hanging from the trellis which supports the most famous grapevine in the city and from which ...

Balthazar interrupts himself as if bored, and concludes

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> It is only another story of our pitiless city. But check to your Queen, unless I am mistaken ... (Mountolive 212).

Psychologically, there is a powerful immediacy in the vivid portrayals of crime and cruelty in the Quartet despite the offhandedness with which these tales are delivered. In this sense Durrell does, as Cecily Mackworth notes, exploit the "Sadean dream of the unleashed subconscious" (27)and utilizes de Sade's ideal of criminality as the perpetual motion machine of human nature and the cosmos to lend dynamism to the space-time construct of the Quartet. Indirectly, then, Durrell manages to forge another connection between physics and psychology — even deviant psychology -- even though in doing so

it is difficult to discern the relationship.

The unleashed subconscious is also manifest in the pscho-sexual elements of the Quartet, which constitute a major part of the characterizations of the Alexandrians as interpreted and re-interpreted by Darley, and to some extent by Pursewarden. In his Preface to Balthazar Durrell reminds us that the Quartet is intended to be an "investigation of modern love." Can this be further translated to mean "love in the age of space-time" or "quantum love"? Within the force field of Alexandria, described by Darley as a place where "sexual provender lies to hand in staggering profusion and variety" and is "the great wine press of love" (Justine 14), Durrell's characters exhibit an astonishing range of psycho-sexual deviancy and moral promiscuity. Justine is unable to take any real pleasure in sexual expression, and says:

> The doctor I loved told me I was a nymphomaniac — but there is no gluttony or self-indulgence in my pleasure ... You speak of taking pleasure sadly, like the puritans do ... I take it tragically (Justine 68).

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Later we learn that Justine was raped as a child (the perpetrator is later revealed to be Capodistria) and as a result, although she moves through her Alexandrian world like a predatory, promiscuous goddess under the influence of what her first husband, Arnauti, refers to as a "check" against her ability to love fully and happily, she has successive affairs with Pursewarden, Darley, and Clea. Her marriage to Nessim is based upon their mutual passion for political intrigue, not for each other. Pursewarden refers to her cruelly as " a tiresome old sexual turnstile through which presumably we must all pass." Clea speaks with Darley about his love for Justine, and her words come from her own experience as one of Justine's spurned lovers:

> the love you feel for Justine is not a different love for a different object but the same love you feel for Melissa trying to work itself out through Justine. Love is horribly stable and each of us is only allotted a certain portion of it, a ration. It is capable of appearing in an infinity of forms and attaching itself to an infinity of people. But it is limited in quantity, can be used up, become shop-worn and faded before it reaches its true object (Justine 130).

Clea is haunted by the memory of her passion for Amaril, the young doctor who eventually marries the gentle and simple-minded Semira who, though beautiful in every other respect, has no nose. Amaril constructs a new nose for Semira with Clea's artistic aid. Later we find out that Clea had aborted Amaril's child in a traumatic and grisly surgical procedure that turned Clea obsessively back toward her art. She undergoes a brief and strangely debilitating sexual liaison with a bored Justine. Eventually she drifts into a relationship with Darley, who is also involved with both Justine and Melissa, a kindhearted prostitute and cabaret dancer who, we are led to believe, is truly loved by Darley despite his philandering. Eventually she succombs to tuberculosis, and Darley takes refuge in Clea. And yet, despite Melissa's apparent devotion to Darley, she says to Clea before she dies:

> Darley made love with a kind of remorse, a despair. I suppose he imagined Justine. He never excited me like other men did. Old Cohen, for example, he was dirtyminded, yet

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> his lips were always wet with wine. I liked that. It made me respect him for he was a man. But Pursewarden treated me like precious china, as if he were afraid he might break me, like some precious heirloom. How good it was for once to be at rest (Clea 214).

Then there is Liza, Pursewarden's blind sister and , it is gradually revealed, his lover. Mountolive falls in love with her, only to discover that she and Pursewarden had a child together who died. Liza has been sexually crippled because of her incestuous history, and her frigidity compromises her feelings for Mountolive to a great degree.

In truth all the characters of the Quartet are in some way psychosexually impaired, despite their superficial insouciance. The motive underlying their behavior is implied by Pursewarden, ever the keen observer and critic of the Alexandrian condition, who writes:

> I believe that Gods are men, and men Gods; they intrude on each other's lives, trying to express themselves through each other ... I think that very few people realise that sex is a psychic and not a physical act (Balthazar 124).

Later he adds: "At first we seek to supplement the emptiness of our individuality through love, and for a brief moment enjoy the illusion of completeness" (Balthazar 234).

The same forces pilot the impulses of the Quartet's gallery of sexual misfits. Balthazar, Scobie and Toto de Brunel engage in repeated episodes of masochistic behavior resulting in severe psychological scarring or, in the cases of Toto and Scobie, death. Paul Capodistria is inexhaustibly promiscuous and rumored to possess superhuman sexual prowess that is attributable, presumably, to his practice of black magic. But he, too, is scarred by a bizarre childhood with a father whose madness drove him to take as his mistress a blow-up mannequin whom he outfitted like a live mistress and frequently took out in public.

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Psycho-sexual pathology is everywhere in the Quartet, in the sense that the term implies behavior deviant from the norms of biologically and sociologically acceptable behavior. The catalog reads like a psychoanalyst's dream: pedophilia, incest, tranvestitism, homosexuality and lesbianism, bisexuality, prostitution, frigidity, and sadcmasochism. However, it is a peculiar characteristic of this aspect of the Quartet that no hint of moral judgement can be detected, due largely to Durrell's dual beliefs that on the one hand "morality should not have an explicit place in an art context" because "to the artist everyone is primally good, however bad or ignorant their actions" (Moore 163); on the dother hand, relativistic objectivity demands a measure of distance from actions to behavior.

Despite relativity's implications for the psychology of perception and the subject-object relationship, the essence of relativity is far beyond the realm of subjective judgement. Not surprisingly, Durrell explains that as far as he is concerned:

> if you think of Eros being the motive force in man: an animal Eros-powered and Eros-dowered, then the idea changes a bit. The sum total of his affective life is Eros which gets differentiated off into different channels, various modes of being. The act of sex itself I take to be a vibration intended, by its orgiastic amnesias, to wake some of the other enigmas of understanding in him (Moore 162).

He adds that human character is in reality "a sort rainbow I should say, which includes the whole range of the spectrum. I imagine that what we call personality may be an illusion, and in thinking of it as a stable thing, we are trying to put a lid on a box with no sides (Moore 163).

Durrell's unique approach to the psychology of his characters has drawn a wide variety of critical responses, many of which seem to overlook the essence of Durrell's experimental interfacing between relativity and psychology. The connection is not always clear within the text. Bonamy Dobrée notes that "these people for the most part have no sense of values" (198). Tilling proposes that if Durrell's "investigation of modern love" has any ancestry at all, then it must be, not relativity

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but Proust's concept of love, because like Proustian love it is "obsessive, corrosive, desperate, highly psychologized. These adjectives do seem to propose a distinctively modern condition, but not the modern condition of love between the sexes" (Moore 53). Furthermore, Trilling adds that

> no one is going to find it easy to believe that what he is investigating is really modern love. For none of Mr. Durrell's lovers has the slightest interest in maturity or in adult behavior or in mutuality of interest or in building a life together or in any other characteristics of healthy relationship which we suppose modern love to be.
>
> ***
>
> ... the lovers do not expect from each other emotional support or confirmation or a sense of security: they may want things still more difficult to get or give, but none of them, in order to get these things, enters into one of those therapeutic alliances which, under the name of marriage, passes with us for the connection of love (52).

They in effect have no occasion to exert their will, and their lives are hallmarked by the ease and elegance born of never having to make moral or behavioral choices, nor of passing judgement on each other. Gerald Sykes sees this quality as "essentially aesthetic, with overtones of bohemian revolt against old fashioned bourgeois morality (148). Sykes views Durrell's Alexandrian dilettantes as redeemable even in their darkness, so that "he in no way minimized the sordidness of his Alexandrian sex-invalids, yet was able to make something robust, wise, amusing, and beautiful of them" (147). Trilling agrees with this assessment, saying that the characters, "no matter what their position in life, no matter what sordidness of circumstance they may accept to further the fulfilment of their love, maintain in their conduct some element of moral heroism" (1962, 54). Durrell refuses to expose his characters to contempt regardless of the pain, amorality, emptiness or animal lust that instigate their various forms of love.

Elsewhere Freudian influences are evident, and Durrell discusses his interest in Freudian psychology at length. There is no need to review the material here, except to state that both in the Key and throughout the Quartet there are extensive references made to Freud's theories concerning

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dreams (which are used frequently in the four volumes to facilitate movement back and forth in time), psycho-sexual complexes, and artistic expression as a form of creative energy. In the Key Durrell makes reference to the significance of Freud's Interpretation of Dreams (1952, 33). He suggests a reading of Francis J. Mott's The Grand Design of the Oedipus Complex, which apparently sets forth in greater detail the concept of a marraige of reason with artistic illumination. Later he explains the correlation between theoretical relativity and Freudian psychology as follows:

> a general knowledge of the preoccupations of the twentieth century is essential if we wish to understand why language has been pushed so far out of shape, and used in such odd ways. The revolution in ideas, both about the outer world (physics and cosmology) and about the inner self (the ego) is clearly reflected in the technique of modern poetry, and can help us elucidate its shifting apprehensions and attitudes (1952, 206-207).

The connection is manifested literarily in Clea, where Pursewarden writes:

> The great schools of love will arise, and sensual and intellectual knowledge will draw impetus from each other. The human animal will be uncaged, and all his dirty cultural straw and coprolitic refuse of belief cleaned out. And the human spirit, radiating light and laughter, will softly tread the green grass like a dancer; will emerge to cohabit with the time-forms and give children to the world of the elementaries — undines and salamanders, sylphs and sylvestres, Gnomi and Vulcani, angels and gnomes.
>
> Yes, to extend the range of physical sensuality to embrace mathematics and theology: to nourish not to stunt the intuitions. For culture means sex, the root-knowledge, and where the faculty is derailed or crippled, the derivatives like religion come up dwarfed or contorted — instead of the emblematic mystic rose you get Judaic cauliflowers like Mormons or Vegetarians, instead of artists you get cry-babies, instead of philosophy semantics.
>
> The sexual and creative energy go hand in hand. They convert into one another — the solar sexual and the lunar spiritual holding an eternal dialogue. They ride the spiral of time together. They embrace the whole of the human motive. The truth is only to be found in our own entrails — the truth of Time. (Clea 131-132).

Art, says Pursewarden, is the "manure of the psyche" and allows for the release and expression of the marriage between time, space and the psyche.

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For Durrell the psyche and the novel are continuous as space-time, and in fact serve as reasonable representations of each other in the process of translating one language into the other. Objectively defined reality can no longer determine personality in its essence; rather, the viewer (or reader) alters and recreates what he sees by the mere act of viewing (or reading). Balthazar tells us that life imitates art and points to Pursewarden as an example; when Pursewarden

> was deeply immersed in the novel he was writing ... he found that his ordinary life, in a distorted sort of way, was beginning to follow the curvature of his book. He explained this by saying that any concentration of the will displaces life (Archimedes' bathwater) and gives it bias in motion. Reality, he believed, was always trying to copy man's imagination, from which it derived (Balthazar 286).

Later Pursewarden adds that "there are as many realities as you can imagine" (Balthazar 315).

Critics of Durrell have evaluated the Quartet in various ways, and assigned to it varying degrees of success. Relativity implies that there is no such thing as the ultimately objective point of view; every vantage point is necessarily subjective to some degree. Moreover, there is no subjectivity that reveals a "right" or superior knowledge of the "truth" of an event. All views are system-dependent, that is, in literary terms the subject-object relationship is a direct function of context, which exists under the rubric of space-time. Durrell tries to reproduce this concept linguistically in the Quartet through the creation of extremely elaborate allusory networks, imagery and metaphorical references. Most critics have focused particularly on these elements in the Quartet and, with few exceptions, avoided the issue of whether Durrell's technique meets the requirements of a word continuum more or less effectively because of the literary complexity of the experiment. Perhaps this is largely due to the fact that before Durrell no one had constructed a significant work of literature specifically upon the tenets of theoretical physics; therefore, there was no precedent for

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evaluation of this kind of literature, despite the many historical precursors in other areas of comparison such as prose style, characterization, historical references, and psychology.

Cecily Mackworth says of the Quartet that:

> Reading the Alexandria Quartet is like taking a lift at a department store and being jerked upward, from Household Wares to Gents' Suitings, from Lingerie to Hairdresser and Theatre Tickets. And each department appears, as it flashes past, startlingly sufficient in itself, yet each takes on another meaning in relation to the homogeneous system through which we are swiftly and effortlessly moving (24).

Pointing out that Durrell is both an artist and a thinker, she says that "The Alexandria Quartet is above all real story-telling " (26) although she finds fault with his tendency to write what she calls "purple passages" for characters whose "style of talking never seems quite to belong to them (Clea is a case in point: many of her remarks smell of ink and could never have been uttered by a human tongue)" (36). She finds a lack of credibility in the Liza-Pursewarden story, deciding "I think we had better take them as symbols of sterility, of everything coming to a dead end" (35).

G.S. Fraser assesses Durrell's abilities from a slightly different angle:

> Durrell's gifts as a writer are those of a lyrical and sympathetic comedian, with an occasional taste, but not a dominating one, for the frightening and the grotesque. His gifts as a master of language are for bravura, for rich excess, though he can write when he wants to with a plain elegance, as in many pages of Mountolive. In his deep self, he is a quietist and almost a mystic. Bubbling over though he is with ideas, one does not have to accept the ideas behind The Alexandria Quartet to enjoy the book ...
>
> * * *
>
> He is a great conjuror (163).

Fraser sees parallels between Durrell's playing with the perverse and sinister fancies that fascinated the late Victorians, but emphasizes that he "only plays" (163). He summarizes his critique by stating that "in the realm of charity of the spirit, for all his dallying with darkness, he strikes me as a more compassionate man than some of the critics who dismiss him as immoral, amoral, a mere belated

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aesthetic fantasist" (163). Durrell himself takes issue with what he believes to be the overly pedantic approach of the English critics of his work, "who score rather like boxing referees (two points per good metaphor) but don't seem to follow the idea which is rather more important than good or bad scenes" (Fraser 230).

Trilling is critical of Durrell's creation of implausible characters and events, but nevertheless admits that "it consorts with my sense of the way people ought to be, in a novel at any rate — that is to say objects of wonder" (65). His harshest criticism is of Pursewarden, who he finds "a self-conscious bore, and in nothing is he so disappointing as in Darley's discovery that his bitterness is really tenderness. Mr. Durrell can do much better than that ..." (1962, 65). Ultimately, though, Trilling credits Durrell's Quartet with "helping to save the language of the novel from Joyce," because "after reading Joyce it is hard to take the prose of most novelists: Joyce makes it seem slack and vulgar" (1952, 63).

Bonamy Dobrée, on the other hand, is far less enthusiastic about Durrell's achievement, although he concedes that "it is an extraordinarily rich tapestry that Mr. Durrell displays; every page is a stimulus to the mind or visual sense" (198). He is unconvinced that the prismatic method of character representation is entirely convincing," and rather than creating characters whose actions and interactions are freed of subjective judgements or referents, Dobrée claims that Durrell's Alexandrians are simply "amoral people in whom there is no real conflict, and so no really dramatic being" (200). This is indeed at times a problem in the Quartet, but the idea of "conflict" implies linear time lines, from which Durrell was seeking to escape; in traditional literature conflict is one element or "event" on the narrative time line extending from the introduction of time, place and characters to the denouement.

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Dobrée appears to find fault with Durrell:

> Mr. Durrell demands of us ... a helpless, not a Stoical acceptance of what at our most feeble we are, a submission without protest to the idea that we are things lived by an It (203-204).

He concludes by saying:

> we might say of this striking experiment what Pursewarden said of Justine: "Justine and her city are alike in that they both have a strong flavour without having any real character " (Justine 139) (204).

That of course very much depends on how one defines "character" and "flavor," both of which qualities are part of Durrell's attempt to re-define the perspective from which we approach the reading of the novel, and the processing of its elements. In an objective reality system "character" is irrelevant even in the face of action, events and observation of events. Apart from this, Durrell's characters are frequently employed as metaphors for concepts in space-time, and he molds them accordingly, alternating between psychological depth and viability, and relativistic subject-object iconography.

Gerald Sykes says of Durrell's work in general that he "has written some of the most sensuous prose of our time, a romancer who can quickly improvise a baroque murder at a hooded ball" even in an otherwise modern plot; Durrell is furthermore "a very prolific writer ... whose ethic is grounded in style" (149). Sykes points out that in writing the Quartet Durrell broke with all the "tough-minded" schools of literature such as the psychoanalytic, social determinist, and existentialist, putting his emphasis instead on what he called "the mythopeoic reference that underlies all fact". However, as we have already discussed, Durrell's break with these schools was not in fact complete, as is amply evidenced throughout the Quartet. What he did do was assemble significant elements from all of the preceding or concurrent movements, and incorporate them under the rubric

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of relativistic spatial-temporal ideology, of which they are all a part. Sykes claims, however, that Durrell's interest in "mythopoeic reference" tends at times to compromise the Quartet since "... though he employs realistic details with authority, he is always looking for the archetypal beauty they conceal" (153). Most important, he compares Durrell to Beckett in that "each is a genuine avant-gardiste, that is, cut off from a popular audience by the nature of his vision ..." (154). The major difference between the two lay in the nature of their respective visions: Beckett's being unrelentingly bleak, and Durrell's resolving itself into a vision of what he termed "the heraldic universe."

Allan Warren Friedman focuses his evaluation of the Quartet on Durrell's treatment of internal and external reality, as well as the nature of truth. He sees Durrell's Alexandria as comparable to Wordsworth's Nature or Hardy's Immanent Will. In yet another variation on the question of who Durrell's primary influences are, Friedman offers the view that "he is conscious heir to the dual tradition of Ford-Conrad impressionism and the Proust-Joyce stream of consciousness" as well as being the most significant contemporary practitioner of experimentalism in the novel" (175). Needless to say, Friedman's assessment does not take into account the postmodernists who have followed Durrell since the publication of the Quartet. However, he cites the "sense of the old constrictions of technique and language being blasted which is the hallmark of the modern experimental novel since Conrad," and is also consistent with key features of postmodern fiction. He adds: "Durrell's most enduring place ... seems most likely to be in the continuing tradition which maintains momentum at least in part because of Durrell — of the modern experimental novel" (188). In this respect Durrell is allied with Einstein, who revolutionized science by thinking of old ideas in new ways. And of Durrell's incorporation of the Quartet Friedman comments:

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> those critics who find it pretentious tend to dismiss all of Durrell's work but their fundamental mistake ... is in confusing eclecticism and dilletantism. Durrell ranges widely in such fields as anthropology, psychology and science, but it is only the "ninnies of critics" (Tennyson's phrase) who insistently emphasize the obvious — that Durrell is not an expert in all these areas. Durrell of course claims no such thing (186).

The critical assessments of Durrell's philosophy and of the Quartet represent the primary concerns of most critics of his work. The Quartet's eclecticism is the major interfering factor insofar as the creation of a word continuum is concerned simply because relativistic ideology can be difficult to assimilate, even without the added task of trying to distinguish those ideas pertaining to space-time, indeterminacy, or quantum reality from ideas borrowed from other fields. Regardless of the fact that space-time contains within its context all other aspects of being, including human existence (which in turn encompasses physical and psychological processes), the effect of Durrell's word continuum is nevertheless diminished at times by what, in strictly relativistic terms, is a great deal of philosophical clutter. In an effort to translate relativity and its peripheral concepts into human terms, he resorts to borrowing from other fields and schools of thought. At times this gambit works brilliantly, and at others it does not. However, in the Key Durrell explains the partiality of his assimilative experiment, and thus relieves himself of accountability for a perfect translation from physics to literature. As far as canon is concerned, the Quartet owes certain of its elements to the naturalists, stream of consciousness narrative writers, the impressionists, Victorian melodrama, and even, as Cecily Mackworth maintains the Romantics, particularly Wordsworthian landscaping.

There are many more qualities directly attributable to literary modernism. However, because of the use of relativity to structure the Quartet, and in creating innovative metaphors and imagery — particularly where time, space (or place) and reality are concerned — the Quartet falls firmly into the

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category of postmodernist fiction. It is an astounding literary tour de force, and the experimental role of Einsteinian space-time in its construction was both ambitious and innovative on Durrell's part.

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